PARTISAN REVIEW

MAY, 1948

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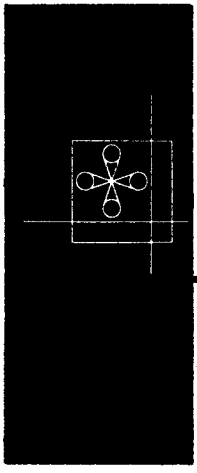

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COMMENT

DISILLUSIONMENT AND PARTIAL ANSWERS

The radical writers made homeless by their break with the Soviet cause, in their search for a vantage-point from which to reassess the contemporary scene, continue to bear witness to their disenchantment. These writers have long been a source of annoyance to certain liberals, respectable social types most of them, journalists, literary men, and academicians, in whose circles the word has gone out that all those troublesome ex-Communists or ex-Marxists are to be lumped together as a group of renegades neurotically "obsessed" with the Russian question and therefore so twisted in their testimony as scarcely to deserve serious consideration. This attitude is as presumptuous intellectually as it is mischievous politically; and what it comes to in the end is a roundabout defense of totalitarianism on the part of liberals so intent on keeping open a line of communication to the power-center in the Kremlin that willy-nilly they become its accomplices. Now, however, that Stalinist aggression and duplicity have gotten us into a new pre-war situation and that the whole Western world has finally come to recognize the crucial importance of understanding the true nature of the Soviet regime, it can readily be seen that the so-called "obsession" of the homeless radicals is a piece of reality, while the apparent sobriety and reasonableness of the official liberals and their opportunistic attempts to take a balanced view of a total evil amount to nothing less than political muddle and cowardice, if not downright collaboration with the enemies of democracy and freedom.

There is also a certain type of literary man, genteel and nonpolitical to the core, a hero of nonparticipation and noninvolvement, who takes it upon himself to scold the homeless radicals for their political bias and assertiveness. Now it is true, of course, that the homeless radicals were nearly all associated, in a variety of ways, with the Communist movement of the thirties. This movement, how-

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ever disastrous in its ultimate results, provided the most significant political experience of the period and the only experience of its kind open to the intellectuals of the Western world; and it is not for those who missed it, who stood aside because of complacence or indifference or immersion in private lives and careers, to lecture those who came through it and out of it—came out not simply with a loss of faith but also with sharpened political instincts and a sense of the pathos as well as the realities of radical politics which the disengaged people who now plume themselves on having stayed put would find it very difficult to acquire.

Moreover, the writers who broke with Communism do not at all form a group with a unified outlook or program. Some, like Gide and Edmund Wilson to a lesser extent, have apparently set aside political interests and returned to the old-style literary life; Malraux and Burnham have gone in for *Realpolitik* with a vengeance; others, like Silone, Koestler, Orwell, Farrell, and Hook, retain, though each in his own distinct way, a basic hope for socialism, while a few have adopted an anarcho-utopian position consoling in its purity but devoid of historical actuality. Hence it is misleading to speak of these writers—and I have mentioned only some of the most prominent among them—as if they stood on common ground, even if all are equally vigorous in their opposition to world Communism and its masters in the Kremlin.

A case in point is John Dos Passos, the latest of those writers to come forward with an important statement summing up his present views. His article "The Failure of Marxism" in the January 19th issue of *Life* appears to be the product of a disillusionment so strong that it has carried him beyond radicalism to the other shore. The location of that other shore is ill-defined, and one's impression is that Dos Passos himself is none too sure of it. Such terms as "left" and "right" or "progressive" and "reactionary" have been so debased by promiscuous use in the liberal press and by the mendacity of Stalinist propaganda that it has become very difficult to employ them with fairness and precision. Still, there can be little doubt that Dos Passos, in his recoil from the ruinous experience of Bolshevism, is now inclined to abandon the basic premises of leftist thinking and to put the values of socialism into liquidation.

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Much can be said against Dos Passos's approach, which seems to us narrow and unhistorical, offering no perspectives for the future. What it suggests, though not quite explicitly, is that individual freedom and the productive capacity of modern economy are somehow tied up for good with the techniques and incentives of capitalism. If that is true then it is really all up with us. For the trend the world over is irresistibly away from private capitalism, and if freedom and productivity depend on its survival then "the regime of the law of the club that centers in the Soviet Union," as Dos Passos so aptly calls it, will surely prevail. His mood, justified no doubt by the fate of radicalism in our time, is that of defeat and pessimism. But there are two kinds of pessimism—a cathartic pessimism which, in purging us of our illusions, reanimates our thought and braces us for the tasks ahead, and a pessimism that brings on intellectual and political prostration. It is the latter kind of pessimism that may well trap the homeless radical mind into a realignment with used-up political formulas and outworn social forces.

The perspective of a democratic socialism, that is, of a planned and socialized economy combined with the fullest political and cultural liberty, has by no means been annulled by historical events. On the contrary, it is still the only possible perspective, despite its present vulnerability in a world dominated by Soviet totalitarianism on the one hand and American capitalism on the other. Of these two forces, both hostile, the former is by far the more barbarous and deadly, and for this reason the libertarian socialists have no alternative but to direct their main struggle against it. In this struggle a strategic alliance, chiefly in this country, with bourgeois democracy and to a certain extent even with the bourgeoisie as a class (insofar as its interests coincide, in however temporary a fashion, with those of democracy) becomes unavoidable and in fact indispensable if the struggle is not to be conducted in a quixotic and futile manner. At this time the opportunity for free socialism arises principally out of the conflict between its greater and lesser enemies. This lesser enemy, namely American capitalism, is now plainly in no position to bear down on the non-Communist left at home or abroad. A series of immense blunders, mainly on the part of Roosevelt in his dealings with the Soviet government, have put capitalism in so perilous a situation that despite all fears and doubts it must extend its support

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to the semisocialist economies of western Europe. It must perforce accept democratic socialism if it is to repulse totalitarian Communism. For many months the Stalinists and their liberal allies denounced the Marshall Plan on the ground that it would be used to re-impose the capitalist pattern on the European economy; but now that the American Foreign Assistance Program has been passed by Congress without discriminatory provisions against socialist governments or "experiments" it has become clear that the cry of "imperialism" was nothing but the propaganda of saboteurs.

In Europe capitalism is worn out, and in this country, too, it has reached that stage of decline when it no longer has sufficient *élan* or self-confidence to engage in imperialist adventures or even to pursue a truly independent class policy in foreign affairs. Its greed is domestic; in foreign policy it blunders and wobbles, relying in the long run on other forces to formulate its aims and lines of action. Thus its resistance to Soviet expansion is just as much inspired by democratic and national interests as by class interests; hence nothing is so wide of the mark, and pernicious in a political sense, as the attempt of certain European leftists, such as Sartre and his friends in Paris, to present the case for peace and socialism in such a way as to ignore the essential distinctions between the American role and that of the Russian expansionists. The truth is that, at present, American "imperialism" is the bogey of people who have not yet succeeded in getting rid of their Stalinist hangover. That, in my opinion, is the secret of Sartre's "Fourth Force."

Without American aid European socialism cannot hope to stop the advance of the Communists, no more than it was able to stop the advance of the Nazis. There is this fact to be considered, that the United States, however reluctantly, is currently financing the effort to convert Great Britain into a socialist commonwealth. (The doctrinaires both of the left and right are of course embarrassed by this paradox, so damaging to their dogmas.) No administration in Washington, in the present predicament of the United States, can afford to exclude democratic socialists from its circle of alliances. This gives rise to an opportunity which it is necessary to know how to exploit, for there are always great risks involved in adopting a policy of the lesser evil. Unfortunately, there is no alternative to this policy. The irony of the situation is that the bourgeoisie too, if that is any

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compensation or solace to us, has been compelled to adopt a policy of the lesser evil, and one that carries far greater risks than ours. Still, in grasping this opportunity it is imperative that we shun any alignment with capitalism apart from the immediate need and that we do not fall in with its flattering idea of itself as the system alone compatible with the practice of democracy.

Now Dos Passos is apparently unable to evaluate the present relation of forces in terms of the struggle against Stalinism. Instead he engages in what seem to us to be purely speculative analogies between the "socialized economies" of Soviet Russia and Great Britain, finding that "in its ultimate implications British socialism is turning out to be not so very different from the Russian brand." That is an inexcusably loose statement, for in Russia the economy is ruled by the arbitrary power of a dictatorship whereas in England it is managed by a representative and fully democratic government. Dos Passos claims that "personal liberty has been contracted in Great Britain," when actually the structure of political freedom is wholly intact. The evidence cited by Dos Passos shows that the contraction he speaks of has occurred solely in the economic sphere. Socialists, however, do not consider the right to buy and sell as one pleases to be a significant part of the heritage of freedom. Since it is not that sort of contraction that set us against Soviet Communism, it is even less likely that it will set us against the effort of the British Labourites.

The policies of the Labour government are indeed open to criticism, but scarcely for the reasons Dos Passos is able to summon. Insofar as that government has not learned the lesson of internationalism and is trying to establish socialism in one country, its effort is bound to fail. It has long been known that the framework of the nation-state is too narrow for a socialist economy. As not a few economists have demonstrated, the frantic drive for export markets, even if successful, offers no solution to the British problem, since it cannot conceivably lead to a rise in the standard of living. The equalization of poverty, undertaken by the Labour government, is a good thing in itself, but after all the task of socialists is to organize not poverty but abundance; and abundance can be attained only through a radical extension of the area of planning and production, in other words, through a federation of European states. Only such a federation or union would make possible a rational division of labor

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in the economic sphere. Politically, too, in terms of the necessity of halting Soviet expansion, a Western federation would decisively alter the balance of power in favor of European democracy as well as lessen its dependence on the United States. The Brussels pact of five nations is nothing more than a military alliance of sovereign states, a feeble substitute for the organic integration and promise of a United States of Western Europe. Bevin and Attlee have just now begun to talk of such a union, and that only under the compulsion of their fear of the Soviet armies. But so far there is very little to show that the socialist vision of the leaders of the Labour government is sufficiently broad to lead them to take the initiative in organizing Europe on a basis other than national atomization and rivalry.

If Dos Passos fails us it is precisely when he appears to equate democracy with "free enterprise." Anyone who has arrived at this regressive equation has gone beyond wanting a socialist policy, let alone a policy based on the strategic use of bourgeois disorientation in the face of the Communist onslaught. But neither can this policy be wanted or even properly grasped by those leftists, like Dwight Macdonald and the more heady contributors to his magazine, who, in their disgust with the absolute politics practiced in Moscow (and in other capitals too) have taken cover in a position of absolute morality and grandiose utopianism, swapping Lenin and Trotsky for Tolstoy and Gandhi. Clearly, these people cannot do without saints and without an ideology, that is, a construction in which operational conceptions and empirical observation are replaced by wishing and believing (and in this instance, also, by attitudes of irresponsible and elegant intransigence gratuitously transferred from the sphere of bohemian aesthetics to that of politics).

There is no more crucial failure of political imagination than the inability to comprehend that there is a price to be paid for decades of socialist defeat and betrayal, and that manifestly the kind of demands on man's nature and society made in the era of the primitive accumulation of millenial faith in socialism can no longer be made with good grace or good sense. The consequences for the human situation of the successive victories of fascism and Stalinism, and the resultant fall of the level of civilization, can be evaded only in the abstract propositions of ultra-leftism, from the standpoint of which

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the differences between American democracy and Russian totalitarianism seem paltry indeed. After all, by concentrating on visionary ends and dismissing the concrete problem of means as mere low-grade practicality, it is easy enough to reach a position of high-minded intransigence that holds out for nothing less than the complete integration of human personality and the satisfaction of human wants without any sort of coercion or frustration. Moreover, these belated anarcho-utopians maintain that a society as splendid as that can be achieved without the aid of science and an advanced industrial technology. So far as they are concerned the disgrace of the atom bomb suffices to put the ban on science and technology! One might have thought that if anything had been established in our time it is that socialism is extremely difficult to come by even under the most favorable material conditions, such as prevail in this country, for example; and surely the totalitarian abortion that Bolshevism produced must remain forever incomprehensible if one declines to take into account the calamitous backwardness of the Russian economy. Nevertheless, Macdonald and his co-thinkers now assure us that socialism is possible irrespective of the economic environment. Why not? Anything is possible, if in your refusal of reality and in the absence of any sense of method in social analysis you unconsciously accept the most inane and hollow of all the assumptions of "progressivism"—the assumption of the original goodness of human nature, a piece of Rousseauistic naiveté that the horrors of the twentieth century should by now have compelled even the most sanguine forward-lookers to abandon.

Macdonald was no sooner done with the Bolshevik Utopia, in its Trotskyite edition, than he began searching for a likely substitute among the odds and ends of older and even moldier Utopias; and now, impelled by excessive ideological strivings, he regularly goes further in his argumentation than he really wants to go, for at some point in his advance toward excess he must have realized that the politically intelligible and feasible has somehow escaped him for good and all. Heinrich Heine, badgered by the more fanatical ideologues of his time to join them in their follies, once remarked with his usual perspicacity that "he who dares not go so far as his heart bids him and reason permits is a poltroon, but he who goes further than he wants to go is a slave." Enslavement of the mind through ideologies is one

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of the more conspicuous phenomena of our epoch. Macdonald is a writer of engaging personality and a marked deficiency of political intelligence. The attitudes he strikes suggest that he is far more open to the romantic lure of extreme ideologies—once it was blood-and-thunder revolution and now it is goodness absolute and invulnerable —than to the appeal of rational analysis. His latest reasoning may be summed up politically in the following syllogism: "Everything has failed us, liberalism, Social Democracy, Bolshevism, and the working class too—therefore let us go forward to the earthly paradise." At bottom this approach is really the same as that of Dos Passos, only turned inside out; it is likewise the product of disillusionment pure and simple. One is precipitant in his rush toward a position of indiscriminate leftism, while the other is equally precipitant in his indiscriminate rightism. Both flee, though in opposite directions, from the difficult and wholly unglamorous possibilities of socialist politics in this desperate age.

"All the beautiful ideologies have burst," a British poet has lately written. That is true, and it has left a good many of us with the kind of wasteland feeling which in the thirties, in the palmy days of Marxist hope and enthusiasm, we used to ascribe to the "bourgeois intellectuals" as their exclusive malaise. Yet painful as the bursting was and damaging to morale, it is time to rally from the blow and to admit that the ideologies, including our own, were too good to be true, too beautiful to be real. Socialism, however, is not identical with its historical ideologies, such as Marxism or anarchism. It remains a viable idea, even if stripped of its ideological trappings. After all, what other ideas are there?

The debacle has taught us what not to expect and what not to believe in. For one thing, it has taught us that something more than the profit motive stands between us and the good society. The power motive is no less potent in human affairs, and of that Lenin and Trotsky told us far too little, though it has already undone all that they appeared to have accomplished through their great revolution. The lesson of experience, too, is that the idea of a revolutionary elite —a selfless brotherhood of world salvationists—leading a proletarian mass sufficiently capable of self-definition to master its social fate is an open invitation to dictatorship. It is plain that the masses

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cannot control their fate once the elite has secured total power through their support and revolutionary effort. This idea must be scrapped, and so must the idea that the sole technique of beneficent change is a violent revolutionary upheaval. This doctrine is shot through and through with eschatological elements inherited from the Judaeo-Christian tradition; besides, its political use is to provide a perfect screen behind which a new and ruthlessly ambitious ruling class can be recruited and trained. Revolution and reform are both instrumentalities of change to be employed in accordance with specific historical circumstances, not to be imposed in advance, by wishful theorizing, on the social process.

But by far the most important lesson of the debacle is that bearing upon the interaction or, better still, the reciprocal dependence of socialism and democracy. It has become indisputably clear that where there is no democracy there can be no socialism, that, in fact, under such conditions all claims to socialism are fraudulent. That was more or less taken for granted among radicals of all groups and parties until the Bolsheviks, to justify their terroristic dictatorship and exploitation of the masses, imposed a fetishism of collective forms of economy, transforming these forms into ends in themselves. Actually, of course, in disregarding the social content which these forms may serve to conceal one disregards the essence of socialism. And at no point is the muddleheadedness of the liberal collaborators of Stalinism more evident than in their willingness to accept the mere fact of the abolition of bourgeois property relations as a proof of the existence of socialism. In reality what has been erected in the Soviet sphere on the basis of the abolition of bourgeois property is a system of state serfdom—a system to which, from the standpoint of culture, individual liberty, human decency, and labor's right to wage an independent struggle for the improvement of its status, liberal capitalism as we know it is vastly superior.

The revolutionary phrases with which this fetishism of economic forms is embellished are of course part and parcel of what Dos Passos rightly describes as "the stale and rotting verbiage left over from the noble traditions of oldtime socialist theory." It is to this verbiage that Miss Freda Kirchwey had recourse some months ago in *The Nation* when she defended the suppression of freedom in the Kremlin's vassal states on the ground that those states were undergoing

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a "revolution." The term "revolution," in Miss Kirchwey's honorific use of it, is taken from the lexicon of old socialist theory in total disregard of its original and classic meaning. In that meaning a revolution was nothing if not a mighty release of political energy on the part of the masses and the smashing of all the old and intolerable restraints and disabilities. Above all, a revolution meant the taking hold of the machinery of power by the poor and exploited. That is not what has happened in countries like Poland, Hungary, and Rumania, where the revolution, in the technical sense of a forced transfer of power, was made not by the people but by policemen, an exploit not envisaged even by the most aberrant planners of socialist change. In all the puppet states it is not the workers who now dispose of the governmental machinery and of the means of production but solely the Communist Party bureaucracy, which, furthermore, is not in itself an independent force. It is the agency of a foreign, that is, of the Russian ruling class. Thus one set of masters has been replaced by another, far more advanced in its demagogy and more ruthless and efficient in its control of the masses. This is what liberalism has come to in this country, that in the pages of a journal like *The Nation* the setting up of police states and the consequent political expropriation of all classes, including the working class, is palmed off as the fulfillment of the revolutionary ideal.

It is this sellout of liberalism that has now been going on for many years that has prepared the ground for the rise of a politician like Henry Wallace. The latter, combining all the wretched delusions of liberalism in his own person and in his own right no mean promoter of the mythical "economic democracy" of the East as against the disdained political liberties of the West, is the most useful quisling that Stalin has so far found in this country. As for his myth of "economic democracy" in the East, in this respect he is surely no better and no worse than Miss Kirchwey, who draws on the ideological fetishism of economic forms to justify revolutions the aim of which is not to liberate but to enslave mankind. Collaborationist liberalism has thus fallen heir to the broken ideology of the Bolsheviks—an ideology so degenerated that in Soviet Russia it has become an alibi for mass-murder.

To my mind, there is no hope for democratic socialism unless it frees itself of ideological prejudices and encrustations. Perhaps

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in the nineteenth century, when socialism was not yet a practical possibility, it needed to bolster itself with an ideology. Its principal ideology turned out to be Marxism, a system containing many valuable insights and therefore by no means to be thrown over as a whole; but this system is also a metaphysical explanation of reality, a mystique of History on the March, a proletarian cult, and the projection of a Messianic kingdom. Insofar as it is so mystifying a totality, radicals would do well to transcend it. For what we need is a *disenchanted socialism,* a socialism defined simply as a socio-economic project of twentieth-century man. Such a project can be freely chosen as a value and as a plan of action. Its purpose cannot be to usher in an era of universal happiness and salvation but rather to solve certain elementary though agonizing problems of human organization in an industrial age. Utopian attitudes are entirely incompatible with this conception, for utopianism subsists on unqualified promises and expectations. The traditional ideologies of socialism have sickened because of their inherent utopianism which passes itself off as science. Lenin, particularly, despite the brilliance of his strategic concepts, was, historically speaking, at once the master and the martyr of utopian illusions. His *State and Revolution,* written on the eve of the October overturn, is a veritable textbook of such notions. From this point of view his thought was far inferior to that of Dostoevsky, who was acute enough to discern that to start with a theory of unlimited freedom is to end up with unlimited despotism in practice. The kingdom of freedom, in the Marxist sense of that phrase, is perhaps unattainable, but one can still believe that human energy and mind are not so sluggish as to be unable to lift mankind to a higher level of necessity.

Philip Rahv

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Elio Vittorini

AN EPISODE FROM "IN SICILY"*

Some time before this I had been very ill for months. I had a profound knowledge of what it meant, that profound misery among the miseries of the working class: particularly when one has already been confined to bed for twenty or thirty days, and has to stay within the four walls of his room, he and the bed linen, the metal of the kitchen utensils, and the wood of the chairs, table, and cupboard.

At such times there is nothing but these things in the world. You look at them, these pieces of furniture, but you cannot do anything with them, you cannot make soup of a chair or a cupboard. Yet the cupboard is so large that it would provide enough to chew for a month. You look at these things as if they were edible: and perhaps that is why children become dangerous and set about smashing things. . . .

The baby has the rung of the high chair in his mouth all day and shrieks if his mother tries to take it away. Mother, wife, or perhaps a daughter, she scans the bookshelf and picks out a volume occasionally and proceeds to read it. She spends hours reading or glancing through its pages.

"What are you reading?" asks the sick man.

The woman does not know what she is reading: yet a book can be anything, a dictionary or an old grammar.

Then the sick man says: "Must you choose this moment to acquire your culture?"

The woman replaces the book, but later returns to scan the shelf of books, not of eatables—and again chooses one, and perhaps

* This episode is taken from Vittorini's novel *Conversazione in Sicilia,* which will be published in this country under the title of "In Sicily." The translation is by Wilfred David.

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leaves the house and spends at least a part of the afternoon out.

"What did it fetch?" the sick man asks her later.

The woman says that it fetched one lira and fifty centesimi. The sick man is discontented. In the fever's unrelenting grip he never fully grasps the situation, as he lies on his side on his bed that is three days stale. Yet he wants something, apart from the book that was his since youth: and he expects a little soup, and bawls out his wife who, instead, has brought bread and cheese for herself and the children.

"Hawks!" he yells at the babies.

They get a plate of soup every day at school. This reveals good intentions, providing a plate of soup every day in schools for the children of people who are dying of hunger. But it seems to serve as appetizer. After that spoonful of soup the boys return home ravenous. Deaf to reason, they are resolved to eat at any cost. They are like wild beasts, they devour chair rungs and they would like to devour their father and mother. Should they find the sick man alone one day, they would devour him. On the table by the sickbed lie the medicines. The boys arrive from school, ravenous, wrought up, their appetites whetted. Prowling like wolves they approach the sick man, they want to eat him up. But their mother is at home, so the boys leave the invalid alone and fall on the medicines.

"Hawks!" cries the sick man.

Meanwhile the gas man has cut off the gas, and the electricity man has cut off the light, and the lengthy evenings are passed in the sickroom in total darkness. Only the water has not been cut off: the water man comes every six months, and thus there is no immediate risk of his arriving and cutting off the water: they keep drinking as much water as they can, water cooked in every form, water boiled and even unboiled.

But there is the landlady who comes every day and demands to see the "sick gentleman," demands to see him in person, and, entering the sickroom and seeing him, she says:

"Well, my sick gentleman—far too extravagant—paying no rent and staying in bed . . . at least send me your wife to wash up for me. . . . "

So his wife goes to the landlady's to wash her pots, to wash her floors, to wash her linen, all in lieu of the unpaid rent, and

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the sick man passes the long hours at home alone with his inexorable fever, which batters at his face, keeps battering at him, rending him as if taking advantage of his solitude.

His wife returns and he asks her if she brought anything from the landlady's house.

"Nothing," says his wife.

She always brings nothing.

"But why don't you at least go and pick some wild vegetables?" he asks.

"Where?" says she.

She walks down the lanes and goes to the park. Grass grows on the fields, green foliage on the trees. Vegetables! She tears out some grass, tears out branches of firs and pines. She goes to the gardens and plucks some flowers and returns home with vegetables—the leaves and flowers hidden in her breast. She flings all this on the sick man, and he lies with flowers strewn over him.

"There you are," says his wife. "Vegetables!"

I knew all this, and more besides. I could understand the misery of a sick man of the human race of toilers and of his family around him. Does not every man know it? Cannot every man understand it? Every man is ill at once, halfway through his life, and knows this strange evil thing that is inside him, knows his own helplessness against it. Thus every man can understand his fellow. . . .

But perhaps every man is not a man: and the entire human race is not human. That is a doubt that arises on a rainy day, when a man's shoes are tattered and water seeps into them: when his heart is no longer captive to anyone in particular, when he no longer has a life of his own, when there is nothing accomplished or to be accomplished, nothing to fear, nothing to lose, and there, outside himself, are being perpetrated the massacres of the world. One man laughs and another cries: both are human, the one who laughs has also been ill, is ill: yet he laughs because the other cries. He is a man who persecutes and massacres: and whoever, in his hopelessness, sees him laugh at the newspaper headlines and the placards, does not seek his company but that of another who cries. Not every man, then, is a man. One persecutes and another is persecuted: not all the human race is human, but only the race of the persecuted.

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Kill a man, and he will be something more than a man. Similarly a man who is sick or starving is more than a man: and more human is the human race of the starving.

I turned to my mother: "What do you think of them?"

"Of whom?" my mother said.

"Of the sick people to whom you give injections."

"I think they won't be able to pay me perhaps," said my mother.

"All right," said I. "You go every day to them all the same, give them injections, and hope they will be able to pay you in return in one way or another. But what d'you think of them? What d'you think they are?"

"I don't hope," said my mother. "I know that one pays me and another can't. I don't hope."

"Nevertheless you go to all of them," said I. "But what d'you think of them?"

"Oh!" my mother exclaimed. "If I go for the sake of one, I can go for the sake of another. It doesn't cost me anything."

"But what d'you think of them? What d'you think they are?" I said.

My mother stopped when we were in the middle of the street, and gave me a faintly squinting look. She smiled too, and said: "What odd questions you ask me! What must I think they are? They are poor people with a touch of consumption or a touch of malaria. . . . "

I shook my head. I asked strange questions. My mother could see that: but she did not give me strange replies. And that is what I wanted, strange replies.

"Have you ever seen a Chinese?" I asked.

"Certainly," my mother said. "I've seen two or three. . . . They come this way selling necklaces."

"Good," said I. "When you have a Chinese before you, and you look at him and see he's got no coat on though it's cold, and his suit's tattered and his shoes torn, what do you think of him?"

"Oh, nothing special," my mother replied. "I see many others here in our village who haven't got coats when it's cold and have tattered suits and torn shoes. . . . "

"Good," said I. "But he's a Chinese, who doesn't know our language, can't speak to anyone and doesn't even laugh ever. He

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travels about among our people with his necklaces and ties and belts. He hasn't bread, he hasn't money, and he never sells anything, he hasn't any hope. . . . What d'you think of him, when you see that he's such a poor Chinese without any hope?"

"Oh!" my mother replied. "I see many others who are like that here among us. . . . Poor Sicilians without hope."

"I know," said I, "but he's Chinese. He's got a yellow face, slit eyes, a flat nose, prominent cheekbones, and possibly he stinks. He's more hopeless than all the others. He has absolutely nothing. What d'you think of him?"

"Oh!" my mother answered. "Many people who aren't poor Chinese have yellow faces, flat noses, and possibly stink. They are not poor Chinese but poor Sicilians, yet they have nothing."

"But look," I said. "He's a poor Chinese who happens to be in Sicily, not in China, and he can't even boast of having a good time with a woman. Now a poor Sicilian could. . . . "

"Why can't a poor Chinese?" asked my mother.

"Well," I said, "I expect a woman would give nothing to a poor wayfarer who happened to be Chinese instead of Sicilian."

My mother frowned.

"I wouldn't know," she said.

"You see?" I exclaimed. "A poor Chinese is poorer still than all the others. What d'you think about him?"

My mother was irritated. "The devil take your Chinese."

"You see?" I exclaimed. "He's poorer than all the rest and you send him to the devil. And when you've sent him to the devil, and then think of him, so poor in the world, hopeless and dispatched to hell, don't you think he's more human, more a member of the human race than all the rest?"

"The Chinese?" My mother looked at me still irritated.

"The Chinese," I said. "Or even the poor Sicilian who lies ill in bed, just like those you give injections to. Isn't he more of a man, more of the human race?"

"He?" said my mother.

"He," said I.

"More than who?" my mother asked.

"More than the others," I replied. "The one who's ill. . . . He's suffering."

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"Suffering?" my mother exclaimed. "That's because he's ill."

"Only?" I said.

"Cure the illness and all is well," said my mother. "It's nothing. . . . It's the illness."

Then I asked: "And when he's hungry and suffering, what is that?"

"Well, it's hunger," my mother replied.

"Only?" I said.

"Why not?" said my mother. "Give him some food and all's well again. It's hunger."

I shook my head. I could not get any strange replies out of my mother, yet I asked again: "And the Chinese?"

Now my mother gave me no reply: neither a strange one, nor one that wasn't strange: she shrugged her shoulders. She was right, of course. Cure the sick man of his sickness, and his pain vanishes. Give the hungry man food, and his pain vanishes. But what is man in sickness? And in hunger?

Is not hunger the whole pain of the world that goes hungry? Is not man in hunger more of a man? More a member of the human race? And the Chinese. . . ?

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Jean-Paul Sartre

FOR WHOM DOES ONE WRITE? (II)*

Up to this point we have been considering the case in which the writer's potential public was nil, or almost, and in which his real public was not torn by any conflict. We have seen that he could then accept the current ideology with a good conscience, and that he launched his appeals to freedom within the ideology itself. If the potential public suddenly appears, or if the real public is broken up into hostile factions, everything changes. We must now consider what happens to literature when the writer is led to reject the ideology of the ruling classes.

The eighteenth century was the palmy time, unique in history, and the soon-to-be-lost paradise, of French writers. Their social condition had not changed. Bourgeois in origin, with very few exceptions, they were unclassed by the favors of the great. The circle of their real readers had grown perceptibly larger because the bourgeoisie had begun to read, but they were still unknown to the "lower" classes, and if the writers spoke of them more often than La Bruyère and Fénelon, they never addressed them, even in spirit. However, a profound upheaval had broken their public in two; they had to satisfy contradictory demands. Their situation was characterized from the beginning by *tension*. This tension was manifested in a very particular way. The governing class had in fact lost confidence in its ideology. It had put itself into a position of defense; it tried, to a certain extent, to retard the diffusion of new ideas, but it could not keep from being penetrated by these ideas. It understood that its religious and political principles were the best instruments for establishing its power, but the fact is that as it saw them only as instruments,

* This third selection from Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* continues the section which was published in the March issue. The translation is by Bernard Frechtman.

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it ceased to believe in them completely. *Pragmatic* truth had replaced revealed truth. If censorship and prohibitions were more visible, they covered up a secret weakness and a cynicism of despair. There were no more *clerks;* church literature was empty apologetics, a fist holding on to dogmas breaking loose; it was turning against freedom; it addressed itself to respect, fear, and self-interest, and by ceasing to be a free appeal to free men, it was ceasing to be literature. This distraught elite turned to the genuine writer and asked him to do the impossible, not to spare his severity, if he was bent on it, but to breathe at least a bit of freedom into a wilting ideology, to address himself to his readers' reason and to persuade them to adopt dogmas which had become irrational with time. In short, it asked that he become a propagandist without ceasing to be a writer. But it was playing a losing game. Since its principles were no longer a matter of immediate and unformulated evidence and since it had to *present* them to the writer so that he might come to their defense, since there was no longer any question of saving them for their own sake but rather of maintaining order, it contested their validity by its very effort to re-establish them. The writer who consented to buttress this shaky ideology at least *consented* to do so and this voluntary adherence to principles which, in the past, had governed minds without being noticed now freed him from them. He was already going beyond them. In spite of himself he was emerging into solitude and freedom. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, which constituted what in Marxist terms is called the rising class, was trying at this same time to disengage itself from the ideology that was being imposed upon it and to construct one better suited to its own purposes.

Now, this "rising class," which was soon to claim the right to participate in affairs of State, was subject only to *political* oppression. Confronted with a ruined nobility, it was in process of very calmly attaining economic pre-eminence. It already had money, culture, and leisure. Thus, for the first time, an oppressed class was presenting itself to the writer as a real public. But the conjunction was still more favorable; for this awakening class, which was reading and trying to think, had not yet produced a revolutionary party which would secrete its own ideology as the Church did in the Middle Ages. The writer was not yet wedged, as we shall see that he was later to be, between the dying ideology of a declining class

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and the rigorous ideology of the rising class. The bourgeoisie wanted light; it felt vaguely that its thought was somehow alienated, and it wanted to become conscious of itself. One could probably find some traces of organization: materialist societies, groups of intellectuals, freemasonry. But they were chiefly associations for inquiry which were waiting for ideas rather than producing them. To be sure, a form of popular and spontaneous writing was spreading, the secret and anonymous tract. But this literature of amateurs did not compete with the professional writer but rather goaded and solicited him by informing him about the confused aspirations of the collectivity. Thus, the bourgeoisie—as opposed to a public of half-specialists, which with difficulty still held on to its position and which was always recruited at the Court and from the upper circles of society—offered the rough draft of a mass public. In regard to literature, it was in a state of relative *passivity* since it had no experience in the art of writing, no preconceived opinions about style and literary genres, and was awaiting everything, form and content, from the genius of the writer.

Solicited by both sides, the writer found himself between the two hostile factions of his public as the arbiter of their conflict. He was no longer a clerk; the ruling class was not the only one supporting him. It is true that it was still pensioning him, but it was the bourgeoisie which was buying his books. He was collecting at both ends. His father had been a bourgeois and his son would be one; one might thus be tempted to see in him a bourgeois more gifted than others but similarly oppressed, a man who had attained knowledge of his state under the pressure of historical circumstances, in short, an inner mirror by means of which the whole bourgeoisie became conscious of itself and its demands. But this would be a superficial view. It has not been sufficiently pointed out that a class can acquire class consciousness only if it sees itself from within and without at the same time; in other words, if it profits by external competition; that is where the intellectuals, the perpetually unclassed, come into the picture.

The essential characteristic of the eighteenth-century writer was precisely an objective and subjective unclassing. He still remembered his bourgeois attachments, yet the favor of the great drew him away from his milieu; he no longer felt any concrete solidarity with his

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cousin the lawyer or his brother the village curé because he had privileges which they did not. It was from the Court and nobility that he borrowed his manners and the very graces of his style. Glory, his dearest hope and his consecration, had become for him a slippery and ambiguous notion; a fresh idea of glory was rising up in which a writer was truly recompensed if an obscure doctor in Bruges or a briefless lawyer in Rheims devoured his books almost in secret.

But the diffuse recognition of this public which he hardly knew only half touched him. He had received from his elders a traditional conception of celebrity. According to this conception, it was the monarch who consecrated his genius. The visible sign of his success was for Catherine or Frederick to invite him to their tables. The recompense given to him and the dignities conferred from above did not yet have the official impersonality of the prizes and decorations awarded by our republics. They retained the quasi-feudal character of man-to-man relations. And since he was, above all, an eternal consumer in a society of producers, a parasite of a parasitic class, he treated money like a parasite. He did not *earn* it since there was no common measure between his work and his remuneration; he only *spent* it. Therefore, even if he was poor, he lived in luxury. Everything was a luxury to him, including, and in fact particularly so, his writings. Yet, even in the king's chamber he retained a rough force, a potent vulgarity; Diderot, in the heat of a philosophical conversation, pinched the thigh of the Empress of Russia until the blood flowed. And then, if he went too far, he could always be made to feel that he was only a scribbler. The life of Voltaire, from his beating, his imprisonment, and his flight to London, to the insolence of the King of Prussia was a succession of triumphs and humiliations. At times the writer enjoyed the passing favors of a marquise, but he married his maid or a bricklayer's daughter. Hence, his mind, as well as his public, was torn apart. But this did not cause him to suffer; on the contrary, this original contradiction was the source of his pride. He thought that he had no obligations to anyone, that he could choose his friends and opponents, and that it was enough for him to take his pen in hand to free himself from the conditioning of milieu, nation, or class. He flew, he soared, he was pure thought, pure observation. He chose to write to vindicate his unclassing which he assumed and transformed into solitude. From

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the outside, he contemplated the great with the eyes of the bourgeois and the bourgeois with the eyes of the nobility, and he retained enough complicity with both to understand them equally from within. Hence, literature, which up to then had been only a conservative and purifying function of an integrated society, became conscious in him and by him of its autonomy. Placed by an extreme chance between confused aspirations and an ideology in ruins—like the writer between the bourgeoisie, the Court, and the Church—literature suddenly affirmed its independence. It was no longer to reflect the commonplaces of the collectivity; it identified itself with Mind, that is, with the permanent power of forming and criticizing ideas.

Of course, this taking over of literature by itself was abstract and almost purely formal, since the literary works were not the concrete expression of any class; and as the writers began by rejecting any deep solidarity with the milieu from which they came as well as the one which adopted them, literature became confused with Negativity, that is, with doubt, refusal, criticism, and contestation. But as a result of this very fact, it led to the setting up, against the ossified spirituality of the Church, the rights of a new spirituality, one in movement, which was no longer identified with any ideology and which manifested itself as the power of continually surpassing the given, whatever it might be. When, in the shelter of the structure of the very Christian monarchy, it was imitating marvelous models, it hardly fussed about truth because truth was only a very crude and very concrete quality of the ideology which had been nourishing it; for the dogmas of the Church, to be true or, quite simply, to be, was all one, and truth could not be conceived apart from the system. But now that spirituality had become this abstract movement which cut through all ideologies and then left them along the wayside like empty shells, truth, in its turn, was disengaged from all concrete and particular philosophy; it was revealed in its abstract independence; it became the regulating idea of literature and the distant limit of the critical movement.

Spirituality, literature, and truth: these notions were bound up in that abstract and negative moment of becoming self-conscious. Their instrument was analysis, a negative and critical method which perpetually dissolves concrete data into abstract elements and the

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products of history into combinations of universal concepts. An adolescent chooses to write in order to escape an oppression from which he suffers and a solidarity he is ashamed of; as soon as he has written a few words, he thinks that he has escaped from his milieu and class and from all milieus and all classes and that he has broken through his historical situation by the mere fact that he has attained reflective and critical knowledge. Above the confusion of those bourgeois and nobles, locked up in their particular age by their prejudices he has, on taking up his pen, discovered himself as a timeless and unlocalized mind, in short, as *universal man*. And literature, which has delivered him, is an abstract function and an a priori power of human nature; it is the movement whereby at every moment man frees himself from history; it is the exercise of freedom.

In the seventeenth century by choosing to write a man embraced a definite profession, with the tricks of the trade, its rules and customs, its rank in the hierarchy of the professions. In the eighteenth century, the molds were broken; everything was to be done; works of the mind, instead of being put together according to established norms and more or less by luck, were each a particular invention and were a kind of decision of the author regarding the nature, value, and scope of belles-lettres; each one brought its own rules and the principles by which it was to be judged; each one aspired to engage the whole of literature and to cut out new paths. It is not by chance that the worst works of the period are also those which claimed to be the most traditional; tragedy and epic were the exquisite fruits of an integrated society; in a collectivity which was torn apart, they could subsist only in the form of survivals and pastiches.

What the eighteenth-century writer tirelessly demanded in all his works was the right to practice an antihistorical reason against history, and in this sense all he did was to reveal the essential requirements of abstract literature. He was not concerned with giving his readers a clearer class consciousness. On the contrary, the urgent appeal which he addressed to his bourgeois public was an invitation to forget humiliations, prejudices, and fears; the one he directed to his noble public was a solicitation to strip itself of its pride of caste and its privileges. As he had made himself universal, he could have only universal readers, and what he required of the freedom

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of his contemporaries was that they cut their historical ties in order to join him in universality.

What is the origin of this miracle by which, at the very moment he was setting up abstract freedom against concrete oppression and Reason against History, he was going along in the very direction of historical development? First, the bourgeoisie, by a tactic which was characteristic of it and which it was to repeat in 1830 and 1848, joined forces, on the eve of taking power, with those oppressed classes which were not in a condition to push their demands. And since the bonds which united social groups so different from one another could only be very general and very abstract, it aimed not so much at acquiring a clear consciousness of itself, which would have opposed it to the workmen and peasants, as to have its right to lead the opposition recognized on the grounds that it was in a better position to make the established powers know the demands of universal human nature. On the other hand, the revolution being prepared was a *political* one; there was no revolutionary ideology and no organized party. The bourgeoisie wanted to be enlightened; it wanted the ideology which for centuries had mystified and alienated man to be liquidated. There would be time later on to replace it. For the time being, it aimed at freedom of opinion as a step toward political power. Hence, by demanding *for himself* and *as a writer* freedom of thinking and of expressing his thought, the author necessarily served the interests of the bourgeois class. No more was asked of him and there was nothing more he could do. In later periods, as we shall see, the writer could demand his freedom to write with a bad conscience; he might be aware that the oppressed classes wanted something other than that freedom. Freedom of thinking could then appear as a privilege; in the eyes of some it could pass for a means of oppression, and the position of the writer was in the way of becoming untenable. But on the eve of the Revolution he enjoyed this extraordinary chance, that he did not have to do more than defend his profession to serve as a guide to the aspirations of the rising class.

He knew it. He considered himself a guide and a spiritual chief. He took his chances. As the ruling elite, which grew increasingly nervous, lavished its graces upon him one day only to have him locked up the next, he had none of that tranquillity, that proud mediocrity, which his predecessors had enjoyed. His glorious and

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eventful life, with its sunlit crests and its dizzying steeps, was that of an adventurer. The other evening I was reading the dedication of Blaise Cendrars' *Rum*: "To the young people of today who are tired of literature, to prove to them that a novel can also be an act," and I thought that we are quite unfortunate and quite guilty, since we have to prove what in the eighteenth century was self-evident. A work of the mind was then doubly an act since it produced ideas which were to be at the origin of social upheavals and since it exposed its author to danger. And this act, whatever the book we may be considering, can always be defined in the same way; it is a *liberator.* And, doubtless, in the seventeenth century too, literature had a liberating function, though one which remained veiled and implicit. In the time of the Encyclopedists, it was no longer a question of freeing the gentleman from his passions by reflecting them back to him without complaisance, but of helping with the pen to bring about the political freedom simply of man. The appeal which the writer addressed to his bourgeois public was, whether he meant it or not, an incitement to revolt; the one which he directed to the ruling class was an invitation to lucidity, to critical self-examination, to the giving up of its privileges. . . .

And as the writer thought that he had broken the bonds which united him to his original class, as he spoke to his readers from above about universal human nature, it seemed to him that the appeal he made to them and the part he took in their misfortunes were dictated by pure generosity. To write is to give. In this way he accepted and excused what was unacceptable in his situation as a parasite in an industrious society; this was also how he became conscious of that absolute freedom, that gratuity, which characterize literary creation. But though he constantly had in view universal man and the abstract rights of human nature, there is no reason to believe that he was an incarnation of the clerk as Benda has described him. Since his position was, in essence, *critical,* he certainly had to have *something* to criticize; and the objects which first presented themselves to criticism were the institutions, superstitions, traditions, and acts of a traditional government.

In other words, as the walls of Eternity and the Past which had supported the ideological structure of the seventeenth century cracked and gave way, the writer perceived a new dimension of temporality

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in its purity: the Present. The Present which preceding centuries had sometimes conceived as a perceptible figuration of Eternity and sometimes as a degraded emanation of Antiquity. He had only a confused notion of the future, but he knew that the fleeting hour which he was living was unique and that it was his, that it was in no way inferior to the most magnificent hours of Antiquity, since they too had begun by being the present. He knew that it was his chance and that he must not waste it. That was why he considered the combat he had to wage not so much as a preparation for the society of the future as a short-term enterprise, one of immediate efficacy. It was *this* institution that had to be denounced and right now, *that* superstition that had to be destroyed immediately, *that* particular injustice that had to be rectified. This impassioned sense of the present saved him from idealism; he did not confine himself to contemplating the eternal ideas of Freedom or Equality. For the first time since the Reformation, writers intervened in public life, protested against an unjust decree, asked for the review of a trial, and, in short, decided that the spiritual was in the street, at the fair, in the market place, at the tribunal, and that there was no turning away from the temporal, but, on the contrary, that one had to come back to it incessantly and to go on beyond it in each particular circumstance. . . .

Thus, the overthrow of his public and the crisis of the European consciousness had invested the writer with a new function. He conceived literature to be the permanent practice of magnanimity. He still submitted to the strict and severe control of his peers, but below him he caught a glimpse of an unformed and passionate waiting, a more feminine, undifferentiated kind of desire which would free him from their censorship. He had disincarnated the spiritual and had separated his cause from that of a dying ideology; his books were free appeals to the freedom of his readers.

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John Berryman

THE LONG HOME

bulks where the barley blew, time out of mind
Of the sleepless Master. The barbered lawn
Far to a grey wall lounges, the birds are still.
Rising wind rucks from the sill
The slack brocade beside the old throne he dreams on.
The portraits' hands are blind.

Below these frames they strain on stones. He mumbles . . .
Fathers who listen, what loves hear
Surfacing from the lightless past? He foams.
Stillness locks a hundred rooms.
Louts in a bar aloud, The People, sucking beer.
A barefoot kiss. Who trembles?

Peach bloom, sorb apple sucked in what fine year!
I am a wine, he wonders; when?
Am I what I can do? My large white hands.
Boater & ascot, in grandstands
Coups. Concentrations of frightful cold, and then
Warm limbs below a pier.

The Master is sipping his identity.
Ardors & stars! Trash humped on trash.
The incorporated yacht, the campaign cheque
Signed one fall on the foredeck
Hard on a quarrel, to amaze the fool. Who brash
Hectored out some false plea?

Brownpaper-blind, his morning passions trailed

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Home in the clumsy dusk—how now
Care which from which, trapped on a racing star
Where we know not who we are! . . .
The whipcord frenzy curls, he slouches where his brow
Works like the rivals' failed.

Of six young men he flew to breakfast as,
Only the magpie, rapist, stayed
For dinner, and the rapist died, so that
Not the magpie but the cat
Vigil upon the magpie stalks, sulky parade,
Great tail switching like jazz.

Frightened, dying to fly, pied and obscene,
He blinks his own fantastic watch
For the indolent Spring of what he was before;
A stipple of sunlight, clouded o'er,
Remorse a scribble on the magic tablet which
A schoolboy thumb jerks clean.

Heat lightning straddles the horizon dusk
Above the yews: the fresh wind blows:
He flicks a station on by the throneside . . .
Out in the wide world, Kitty—wide
Night—*far across the sea* . . . Some guardian accent grows
Below the soft voice, brusque:

"You are: not what you wished but what you were,
The decades' vise your gavel brands,
You glare the god who gobbled his own fruit,
He who stood mute, lucid and mute,
Under peine forte et dure to will his bloody lands,
Then whirled down without heir."

The end of which he will not know. Undried,
A pruneskin helpless on his roof.
His skin gleams in the lamplight dull as gold
And old gold clusters like mold

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Stifling about his blood, time's helm to build him proof.
Thump the oak, and preside!

An ingrown terrible smile unflowers, a sigh
Blurs, the axle turns, unmanned.
Habited now forever with his weight
Well housed, he rolls in the twilight
Unrecognizable against the world's rim, and
A bird whistles nearby.

Whisked off, a voice, fainter, faint, a guise,
A gleam, pin of a, a. Nothing.
—One look round last, like rats, before we leave.
A famous house. Now the men arrive:
Horror, they swing their cold bright mallets, they're breaking
Him up before my eyes!

Wicked vistas! The wolves mourn for our crime
Out past the grey wall. On to our home,
Whereby the barley may seed and resume.
Mutter of thrust stones palls this room,
The crash of mallets. He is going where I come,
Barefoot soul fringed with rime.

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Clellon Holmes

FRAU VON STEIN, MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

Some postman rings but never sees you either.
You pick up letters, then take coffee or a class,
Reading them on a step somewhere who keep my brother

When you read. You carefully wade his nerve's morass,
Seeking an upland in the words, a solid stone,
But reaching no neural bog you cannot gracefully pass.

You chose your role as comrade, knew he needed one.
Concerned recipient of him as letter-lover,
You water whimsy and digest the purgative pun,

Temper the outbursts, make his definition mover,
Say only, with your tact, you actually seek yourself
In this, a monologue you do not seek to smother

When you write. Why do you save his letters on a shelf?
You're one he goes to after hours. Are you alone?
And is your love's neutrality the only health

For him? Perhaps you're cynic as you read him grown
Beyond the early envelopes. Or he cuts cruelly your heart
But brings some frantic palatal air it's never known.

Or are you what you are, the simple cool remark
Encased in understanding that he rav'nously reads
And angers at or loves, which leaves its medical mark?

He thinks you wishfully up when passion makes him plead,

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Dreams you when madness rants or infidelities pour out;
Forgets you often starve to let him love his greed.

But does not see you're what his gluttony's about.

Richard Wilbur

PITY

The following day was overcast, each street
A slow canal to float him to the place
Where he'd let fall the dear and staring face,
A funnel toward the thin reproachful tweet.

All day the starved canary called him back
In newsboy's whistle, crying of a tire,
Squeak of a squeegee, sirens finding fire,
Until the nightfall packed his head in black,

And he went back and climbed the stairs again,
Stepping across her body, freed the bird,
Which left its cage and out the window whirred
As a bad thought out of a cracked brain.

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Alfred Kazin

FROM AN ITALIAN JOURNAL

"He ought to have a hundred hands to write, for what can a single pen do here. . . . " Goethe: Rome, 1786.

Florence, June 11, 1947—The night man at the hotel desk is a wizened, fatherly hunchback, with a face that belongs with the insignia of little keys fastened to the lapels of his official frock coat. In the hot and windless summer night, while millions of little green insects buzz around the flickering street lamps along the Arno, he bustles behind the bar, amused at our thirst, gently lifting stoppers from decanters and bringing up green and purple bottles from some mysterious cellar bin under his feet. An old magician doing his act for spellbound children, he first pours out a little of this and then a little of that, pretending to look amazed at their instant transfusion, and as he squeezes the soda over the highly colored surface, cries out *Eccola!*—but with a patient solicitousness that says plainly that while nothing will relieve our thirst if we insist on it so impatiently, he will go on inquiring into bottle after bottle, if we wish.

The lounge is an old family parlor, with the rubber plant on a lace doily over the upright piano, heavy brass-framed pictures of hunting dogs and "The Stag At Eve," and old copies of *The Illustrated London News.* A withered English blonde sits in one corner, reading *The Times,* and from time to time calls across the lounge in a piercing "Oxford" accent, recounting to another *inglese* her difficulties with the Italian law, "so unnecessarily complicated." She has come back to reclaim a house bought before the war. In another corner a man with the burned-out face of Oswald Spengler: completely bald, shaven head, rocklike Prussian military skull, burning little eyes, a fierce wide scar running across his left cheek and deep into his neck like a singed envelope. Junker face, haughty with suffering: he never looks at anyone, and prowls around the lounge smoking cigarettes out of a long jeweled holder.

All signs and instructions are first in English, then in French, and

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occasionally underwritten in Italian. The atmosphere is that of a provincial British hotel in an eternity of Sundays, though *they* "no longer come to us as they used to. They, too, are passing through difficult days." Americans, of course, are wonderful—so gay, so young, etc.; but the manager's daughter, whose English is impeccable B.B.C., complains with a little pout that her friends laugh at her—"my accent has become a little coarse"—since the GI's were here.

To the left the Ponte Vecchio; to the right the provisional iron structure that has replaced the Santa Trinità. The gallery that led from the Uffizi Gallery to the Pitti is broken in the middle; on both sides of the Ponte Vecchio a jagged heap of ruins, lit up under the solitary street lamp, has that crumpled, uncovered look of scenery the minute the footlights are turned off. In the daytime the ruins look peculiarly incongruous, a tabloid headline in an illuminated manuscript, against the round towers and the slender cypresses, each cluster of them supreme on its hill. The Germans were on one side of the river and the Americans on the other; hard to think of Florence being fought over on this street.

At the noon hour an old man in an old boat, moored in the middle of the Arno just below our window, patiently dredging up mud from the bottom, hour by hour, which he as patiently packs up on every side of him. Across the way a little boy swimming off a little delta that has formed in front of his house. A scull shoots by, propelled by a young man in tights and blazer and wearing that smart little beard—Dino Grandi, Italo Balbo—why did I think it was worn only by Fascist aviators and ambassadors? Just below the embankment, on the other side of the river, the familiar whitewash slogan we saw on every wall coming down from Genoa: *VOTATE PER IL P. COMUNISTA CHE VI DARA' PACE LAVORO LIBERTA'.*

June 12—Ran into P., who was born in New York of Italian parentage and originally came here before the war to finish a medical course. An ex-GI and, of course, armed with the precious green passport: which will do for us what Roman citizenship once did for St. Paul. He gets around familiarly in American army circles from Leghorn to Pisa and has the friendliest relations with the brass. With the tough-faced pal who is saddled on us everytime we see him, he is engaged in some elaborate financial exchange deal that obviously pays off. (The lire today 650 to the dollar; some weeks ago it was 900.) They go around Florence with great wads of lire stuffed into one of those vertical leather zipper bags that are sold at home for packing a bottle of whiskey into a suitcase. The pal, who might be an extra in a gangster

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film, is bursting with prosperity; explained things to me with a condescension that did not hide his awe at my ignorance. Funny to see him standing under the statue of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the latest *New Yorker* in one hand and that moneybag in the other, looking like an Oklahoma Indian who has just discovered oil.

P. a sensitive guy, and a little pathetic—the medical degree is indefinitely postponed, and his life at the moment is simply that of a British planter self-exiled to Kenya, piling it up for the wife and kiddies at home. He wants to make what he can in this crazy period and then clear out. Yet despite some vague efforts to dissociate himself slightly from his pal, at least in our eyes, there is no doubt that he is having the time of his life. The thing's absolutely unreal: he's way up there, in that new American world in Europe. After years of being a nobody at home, and no doubt a "Wop" to the Gentiles, he is now making the most of his Italian-American background, dines with generals, and with the best will in the world, patronizes the old country. Actually he does not seem to like the Italians very much—says they "simply have no character," and with a certain intellectual disapproval outlines the black-market situation to me, specifying that the government does not govern, that the whole economy rests on private buying and selling, and that the political situation is absolutely hopeless, divided between the priests and the Commies. Personally, he assures me, he is a democratic socialist, and rails against Nenni for surrendering the Italian Socialist Party to the Communists. But this with a blasé, mocking air, as if to say: what can you expect of these people? Funny to think of him among the smart American promoters and finaglers who are here to pick up some easy money, for with all his amiable commercial guile and know-it-all air, he really *hates* Italy for letting him down, morally, so hard. Isabel Archer and Christopher Newman and Hemingway's tough American ingénues: somehow the pattern never changes. How *could* Europe be like this? Still, caught in between the two great blocs, a vacuum has been created here, which obviously some natures do not abhor. There's money in it. Yet notice how these two American types, P. and his pal, respond to their opportunity—the pal frankly a good deal of a mug, indifferent to those who cannot play it smart; P., with his typical American intellectual's contempt for politics, yearning for democratic socialism, but meanwhile unable to forgive "Europe" for destroying his personal illusions—which, if he had saved them, would have left his wife and kids at home in a precarious situation. What a difference from those old British traveling salesmen, with their contempt for the natives and their quietly expert managerial ways!

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June 13—In the great Duomo, Santa Maria del Fiore, above the altar in the choir, Christ hangs supine on his cross, but wearing a golden crown that is much too large for his head. His knees are upraised, as if he had been struggling with death, and the paralysis had struck him where he fought; but his whole body slopes downward with a weariness in which I feel the weight of the ages. Every line of him is cast in pain, renunciation, and silence. Yet here he is Christ the King, and so named not by his enemies in mockery, but his own Church. At the foot of the altar, a young monk sweeping the red cloth and smoothing out the breaks in the carpet. How strange it is to pass behind the altar and, looking down the whole length of Christ's poor, bent figure, twisted into the deepest suffering and hopelessness, so forlorn above the ornate altar—how strange to realize that the sculptor perhaps overdid it—see that here he looks not a king but a scarecrow, and that the crown which is so large for his head expresses not so much amazement and homage before him who undertook so much, as the condescension of authority to its own figurehead.

The faces of young monks, like the faces of young girls in the climax of adolescence—both meeting in the same corridor, but the one going back as the other goes forward.

June 15—Sunday—Nenni spoke this morning in the great "town square," the Piazza della Signoria. By ten the Lungarno was jammed with workers walking or riding along to the meeting in trucks—the old men a little sedate, buttoned up into frayed jackets despite the blisteringly hot day; the youngsters cheering, singing, and gaily waving their red flags. The girls looked wonderful. Everyone says that they have been liberated since the war, and they certainly look it as they come tearing along on their bicycles, flapping their sandals against the pedals, with their long, black hair streaming behind. A band trotted along blaring out the Garibaldi hymn and *Bandiera Rossa.* It was all like a light-hearted Sunday excursion en masse—the sun sparkling on the river and the long white sheets hung out of the windows; uncovering depth on depth of green out of the trees. Staggered with sun, drunk with light. I feel these days as if my body had grown taste buds all around it, and every cell were eating at Italy without getting its fill.

At the meeting itself the beauty and unexpectedness of the scene were so overwhelming that at first I could hardly give attention to what was being said. In an angle of the enormous square two contrasting structures—the Old Palace (really the City Hall) on one side; startlingly unaged, its gay and arrogant tower suddenly rearing itself with a kind of deceptive lightness up from behind the row of battlements. On the

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other the Loggia dei Lanzi, crammed with statuary, set below the Palace like a sideboard at a great feast of stone. There is about the Palace at one side a curiously scalloped and rippling effect, as if the architect had omitted some base to its rhythmic structure and then made it up—with what triumph and ease—in the upward leap of the tower, which gives that exhilarating effect of humor in its own authority. (And in fact something was omitted, for I learn that the architect was forbidden to use any of the ground that had belonged to the hated Ghibelline family of the Uberti.)

The speakers held forth from the Loggia. We stood in the center of the square, near the tablet that marks the place of Savonarola's execution. If one tired of Nenni or the meeting, one could always regale oneself with the Palace, the centerpiece of Neptune, and the reproduction of Michelangelo's David which stands just before the door of the Palace. Nenni must have felt as if he were discoursing from the Florentine Acropolis; there were little compliments and expressions of pride on addressing the citizenry from that celebrated place. He stood behind a loud-speaker, his arms toiling furiously with the conventional Italian vigor, but his face impassive as an owl's under his heavy spectacles. A dumpy little man, bald and round, looking like a union boss at a convention, sweating away, while behind him "The Rape of the Sabine Women," "Hercules Slaying the Centaur Nessus," and Cellini's Perseus —the bloody sword in one hand and with the other majestically holding aloft, with his cool and savage gravity, the head of Medusa. Yet no doubt even Lorenzo the Magnificent must have looked dwarfed and a little mean in that mighty piazza, or Savonarola haranguing the Florentines on their immoral ways—for the whole effect of the Piazza della Signoria is to create in an instant the civic and aesthetic presence of a great city-state. There is something in the ensemble formed by the Palace, the Loggia, the Neptune and the David, the color and weight of the stone, the very historical imagination embodied in a European square, that makes the impervious surface of a fully completed thought. With the imprint still on us of those cramped, functional cities created purely out of commercial relationships, we enter into this piazza with a disbelief almost stronger than our pleasure, as if we were of another race from those who built *this;* as if, with its obvious indifference to anything we might think of it, it could vanish the minute we turned our backs on it.

Not the place, I would have said, for a tired old Social Democrat leading a "popular front" rally. Certainly everything about Nenni himself is commonplace, and brings up thoughts of those battered but crafty

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relics of the Second International who have decided, after years of futility, to float to success on the Stalinist wave of the future. L. finds Nenni's stubbornness on the Communist issue typical of the Romagna—Mussolini's region—and draws many parallels between their attitudes toward Italian Socialism. But why make it a question of personal traits? Nenni is only another expression of the long, inner defeatism of European socialism, and obviously scared by the prestige and the mass base the Communists built up during the war. According to P., who recently talked with him, Nenni's pro-Communist line is a gamble. Privately Nenni says: "Sooner or later the Russians are going to take over. It's in the cards. I'm for us to become a Czechoslovakia rather than a Poland or Bulgaria." The Communists dominate the largest section of the working class—if the Socialists separate themselves from them, Nenni says, what happens to their mass base? Half the workers in the Milanese factories hold cards in the C.P. Probably the greater part of the crowd this morning was Communist, to judge from the yells and cheers that went up whenever Nenni flattered the party. Yet I noticed that easily the most popular part of his speech was his strong declaration that Italy should remain neutral in any war between Russia and the U.S. Nenni has to keep a lot of people happy at once.

R. drove us out to Settignano to see the Bernhard Berenson villa, *I Tatti.* In the courtyard, which might have been the entrance to one of the retreats at which the storytellers in the *Decameron* flourished during the plague, there was a row of neat little lemon trees, each set in its black bucket with finicky care. The lemons all drooped in a plane, exactly at an equal distance from the ground—with what immense and induced art it was not difficult to imagine. The elaborated niceness of the symmetry introduced me to Berenson's mind even before I met him.

The butler seemed uncertain whether to admit us, Berenson being away, but Leo Stein,* Gertrude's brother, whom R. knows slightly, came out of the library and offered to show us around. Stein is a tall, gentle, gangling old man, now seventy-five, who looks like a Jewish Uncle Sam —very rustic, nervous, deaf, but full of talk and little wisecracks, all of them delivered in such a flat, uncompromised Middle Western twang after his thirty or forty years of Italy, that it was strange in that braided garden to take in his mussed, blue serge suit and hearing aid, the knapsack over one shoulder. He sounded out like the authentic voice of Allegheny, Pa.

* He died later in the summer, some weeks after our meeting.

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The Berenson house very beautiful and quietly massed with treasures, but almost too exquisite to walk in. It is like a private chapel raised to the connoisseur's ideal experience, where every corridor and corner has been worked to make a new altarpiece, and where the smallest detail reveals the mind of a man who has the means to reject all intrusions of mere necessity. He has shaped the whole with an inflexible exactness of taste that is just a little chilling. Curiously, its greatest effect is not so much to lead you to its pictures as to shame you into a fresh realization of how awkward, soiled, and generally no-account life can seem compared with art. In the dim light of the shaded corridors those Sienese giants gaze past you, lost in their own dream of time and interred in an oily gloss—their faces tortured with thought and goodness, and somehow *away,* bearing your praise and awe with equal indifference. What golden and mysterious fish!

I noticed how jumpy Stein became when we stopped too long before some pictures. Of course, showing his friend Berenson's house must have been a bore; he had been in and out of the place for years, and comes almost daily now to work in the library. Yet I was a little surprised, knowing of his life-long concern with painting, to hear him confess that it was not the work of art that mattered to him so much as the mind of the painter. He is very much preoccupied with all sorts of psychological questions and told us that he had just (at seventy-five) finished psychoanalyzing himself. The devouring interest of his life was to discover why men lie. This is something that evidently touches him very deeply. While he had been showing us pictures and rooms with a certain irritation, and made affectionate, mocking little digs at Berenson's expense (their rivalry is famous), he suddenly, in Berenson's study, went off into a long discourse about psychology and the need for scientific exactness in determining character. He spoke with a kind of uneasy intensity, as if he had been held in on this topic for a very long time, and wanted our understanding with or without our "approval." It was of the greatest importance to him, this practice of lying; it would be a key to all sorts of crucial questions, if only he could get his hands on the solution; it was, you might say, at the center of human ambiguity. As he went on he would look up at us every so often, pull irritably at his hearing aid, and grumble: "What? What? You think what? I can't hear you!" riding impatiently over us and his deafness for standing in his way, and rearing up against our passing comments with a loud cry, very moving in an old man, which seemed to come straight from the heart: "It's important! It's the big thing! No one looks these facts in the face! Animals can't lie and human beings lie all the time!"

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He was, however, very happy these days; had got over a bad illness and was just publishing a new book* in the States; there was a lot of work ahead of him. He talked about his writing with a mingled anxiety and enthusiasm, as if he were just starting out on his career; though very frail, he gave the appearance of a young writer speculating dreamily on all the books he is going to write. I should have caught on sooner, but didn't until we went into Fiesole to have a drink: he had always suffered from a bad case of being Gertrude Stein's half-noticed elder brother, and now that she was dead probably felt liberated to go on with his own career. His resentment of her shone through everything he said. Talking about their childhood in Europe, when they had been trundled around by a father "who didn't think we could get any kind of decent education in America," he remembered most how Gertrude had always lorded it over him. "But you know," he said simply, "she was the kind who always took herself for granted. I never could." And one saw that she had dominated the situation when they had decided to make their lives in Europe. "She always took what she wanted! She could always talk her way into anything! Why,"—discussing her pioneer collection of modern paintings—"she never even *liked* Picasso at first! Couldn't see him at all. *I* had to convince her. And then she caught on and got 'em for practically nothing." After all those years, the bitterness rankled, keeping him young. How often, I wonder, has he been approached only as a lead to his famous sister, and this by people who haven't the slightest knowledge of his interests? It must be this, added to his long uncertainty about himself, which lends that strangely overemphatic quality to his interest in "facts." Facts—the masculine domain of elder brothers humbly and grimly toiling away at *real* things, like aesthetics and psychology, where Gertrude, the mother of them all, took the young geniuses under her wing and, always the last of the feminists, did as she pleased—even to putting the English language in her lap like a doll, and making it babble out of her inscrutable naturalness and humor. *She always did as she pleased.* Strange to see him now, at his age, going back and back to the old childhood struggle. They had transferred the cultural rivalry in that prosperous Jewish family to Europe and worked it in and out of the expatriate life, making of Paris and Florence new outposts for an old ambition.

Rome, Oct. 28—Berenson. I had missed him in Settignano, but went to see him today at his hotel just off Trinità dei Monti. It was very

* *Appreciation: Painting, Poetry and Prose.* Crown Publishers, New York. 1947.

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cold, and he sat in a corner of the sofa with a rug over his knees, precise as one of his own sentences. Eighty-two: delicate little *élégant* with a little white beard, very frail, an old courtier in his beautiful clothes, every inch of him engraved fine into an instrument for aesthetic responsiveness and intelligence. He spoke English with such purity and beauty of diction, blandly delivering himself of his words, one by one, that he might have been putting freshly cracked walnuts into my hand. He took me in quickly, quietly, absolutely. "Your name is of course Russian and no doubt you are a Jew? There seem to be so many young Jews writing in the States these days. How is that? Quite a difference from my time!" "Oh! and is there much anti-Semitism in the States these days? Oh!" He was extremely attentive; it was all, one was left to gather, a distant but not uninteresting fact to him, himself a Jew, "born in Lithuania, in the Jewish aristocracy, the old gentry," and taken at a very early age to Boston. Being a "Jewish aristocrat" has probably always been his *carte de visite* in the outside world, from President Eliot's Harvard to Henry James's London, as it was so immediately a way of dissociating himself gently from any possible entanglements he may have incurred by interesting himself in American Jewish life. To be a Jewish aristocrat does not diminish one's foreignness, but transfers it to another plane—like that Negro who went South with a turban on his head and was welcomed everywhere as a foreign potentate.

He reads everything; there was even a copy of that shabby little *Rome Daily American* on his lap when I came in, and it is curious how incongruous he makes anything so typically journalistic and American look in his presence, so unbroken is the effect of elegance he gives to any room he sits in. Every day he goes through at least one Italian, French, Swiss, and English newspaper; takes all the reviews and magazines, even *Time*. It was all out of an intense curiosity in the political behavior of the human animal. Remembering his extraordinary library, one had a picture of him at *I Tatti* as another Voltaire at Ferney, a kind of European intelligence office—yet subtly remote from the pressure of events, each of which he put away in some chamber of his apparatus for meditation. He kept coming back to Henry Miller, whose works he knew fully, and whom he detested. He vaguely shared my admiration for that moving long story in *Sunday after the War* which recounts Miller's return to his parents' home, but with this thought under consideration he turned Miller into a dreary historian of the imponderable petty-bourgeois bleakness of Brooklyn rather than the "cloacal" and confused rebel he had just dismissed. He said "clo-acal" in a way that made me see all the refuse coming up from the bottom of the Tiber

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and gathering itself into the collected works of Henry Miller. And of course I shared in the general illusion that Kafka was a great writer? "There is a very small light of reason burning in the world," he said reflectively. "Mr. Kafka tries to put it out." He had exact, firm judgments on everything that crossed his path; his years, his fortune, his snobbery, and his taste have given him a freedom in getting past conventions that is highly stimulating if not very satisfying—it is as if he were surveying the present from a point removed in sympathy; I miss that quality which alone makes a thinker interesting, his commitment to the living. We were talking about the cultural inertia and provincialism which become deeply felt after one settles into Italy, and he thought the decline had set in with the Risorgimento—which is curious not because there is any lack of skepticism today in Italy about the vaunted traditions of the Risorgimento, but because of the example that immediately came to his mind. One was left to infer that the cultural elite had surrendered its prerogatives. Why, in his first years in Italy one could still pick up from Roman pushcarts first editions of English eighteenth-century novels which had come straight from the shelves of the old nobility. He finds Italians now lacking in individuality. Curious to see how he touches on all these things quite outside the realm of historical development; he goes straight to fundamental themes of *style*. The long romance with Italy is probably over—obviously "Italy" the aesthetic concept, Italy as he first knew it and as he has retained it at his villa with such devotion and finesse, has had to bear the burden of a certain jarring or contradiction under the pressure of recent events. There must be odd infringements on so exquisite a connoisseur's existence that make one reflect on how hard it is to possess fully everything we buy in this world.

We talked about his old friend Santayana, who is living not far away as a guest of the Nuns of the Blue Sisters—they no longer see each other. Curious to think of these two old intellectual grandees finishing out their lives in Italy, the one a Spaniard and the other a Lithuanian Jew, but both formed by their early life in Boston and at Harvard. They were together at the Boston Latin School, at Harvard, and in Germany thereafter—Santayana always one year ahead, as he is one year older. He greatly admires Santayana, and it was only when talking about him that he seemed younger and less *distingué* than anyone else you ever heard of—but they are estranged, and to judge from the oily and characteristically malicious tone Santayana takes to him in his memoirs, the friendship ended on his side rather than on Berenson's. In Santayana's eyes, Berenson was simply a pushing Jew; he has never

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liked Jews who do not know their place; despite the magnificent presence, the *soigné* air, the echoes of Pater and Matthew Arnold, the great fortune built up by Berenson as a consultant to millionaire collectors, the villa, and the "Jewish aristocracy" of Lithuania, one is compelled, after sixty years, to recall Berenson as a young immigrant given his start by Mrs. Jack Gardner. But how he looks up to Santayana, and how he rejects the faintest criticism of that great man, who is always the idol of nonphilosophic minds who are never quite sure what he is getting at! Berenson himself hadn't read the Santayana memoirs; his secretary told him not to, he would be too distressed. And very pleasantly and understandably, he didn't care about men like Whitehead—pure thinkers who thought about thinking. Yet I was not to offer the slightest possible irreverence on the subject of Santayana—my faint complaint being his addiction to pseudo-classic Wisdom. In some way Santayana's life has always been a touchstone for his own—the manner conceals an extraordinary humility, it seems. And meanwhile there is Santayana in his convent cell and Berenson in his villa: not "expatriates," not "Americans," simply unbound to any particular country. Both with that strange formative early life in New England, and with no place to go back to, the last New England heroes of the James saga, yet quietly and firmly superior to all national limitations—truly citizens of the world, and discoursing of essential things, above all contemporary battles, in an English that comes straight down to us from the Boston of seventy years ago.

Florence, June 16—Café scene in the Piazza della Repubblica, which everyone absentmindedly still calls the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. In the moonlight hundreds of people sitting at those long lines of tables, row on row, between the hedges of rubber plants that mark off one café from another; an audience waiting to make its own play. Wonderful to watch the long appraising stares, like an expert judging horseflesh, with which these open-air troglodytes look each newcomer up and down. No one misses a thing. They may look bored and weary to death, with scales over their half-closed eyes, sipping indifferently at their miniscule cup of *espresso* as if there were all the time in the world and they had been sitting here, with that same cup of coffee, spoon, and water carafe, since the Etruscans. But in the air the preparatory vapors of a seduction; these are buds that open only at night. As soon as a new one walks into the lighted den, making the grand tour up and around the long line of tables, faint waves radiate from brains chattering with thought and speculation. Ah, some more of the *Americani*. The waiter in his soiled and patched evening clothes grins and bows; the three

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whores glumly sitting together go through the girls with unforgiving eyes like one of those electric signal boxes in a prison corridor that ring an alarm bell if there is any metal on your person. The cigarette vendors come screeching around like a flock of gulls maddened by the smell of food off the ship's bow—old, young, sick, every age and every human condition, each of them with his little suitcase held out before him like a tray. *Sigarette? . . . Nazionali . . . Americane!* Every five minutes a beggar appears at the table—usually old women with black shawls and the look of the eternal mother of sorrows, leading little barefoot girls whose faces are so gray and bent with suffering, whose arms hang so miserably at their sides as if they had been scratching old sores, that you find yourself either responding to the situation or rewarding the impersonation. Under the table more barefoot kids in discarded GI pants and American Air Force jackets, hunting cigarette ends and storing them carefully in little tin pails; it will all go to make "new" American cigarettes. In the history of Europe this age should go down as that of the Pax Americana, or the secondhand butt.

The beggars cover the café in waves; they make sure never to come up together or at too close intervals, and while one makes his rounds the others stand at the hedge, like actors waiting to go on. Notice how the Italians give, every time. They may look indifferent and after the tenth approach exasperated beyond words, but after shrugging their shoulders or trying the frontal attack method (*Signora! Have mercy! Do you think I'm the Bank of Italy?*) they come up with the usual. The crucial test comes when someone at a table tries to look away. Hopeless. The beggar simply keeps turning with him and stares him down.

In the brilliantly humming summer night all these café dwellers, each moored in his cultural swamp, gently pushing at the world outside like a fly caught in a dish of honey. The faces lack that paunchy, pasty look of the normally overfed at home: here you can actually see the bony structure brought into the world at birth. The general level of good looks is amazing: face after face with that focused sensuality that is always the personal ticket of young actors and actresses. Most of them emptily looking out to sea, or engaged in a little deal. The air is damp with sex, but you can hear sums being recited at table after table; the whole piazza is one great bourse for the black market. *Centotrenta lire . . . centosessanta . . . tremila quaranta.* A fierce-looking boy in his late teens rides up on a bicycle and unerringly goes straight to the American faces and clothes. Will you buy American cigarettes—real *American* cigarettes, not counterfeit? Wanna change your money,

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mista? Heh, mista? Will you for God's sakes *sell* him something? You think he hasn't got the money? Takes out a great wad of sweaty lire. "Listen!" he says disgustedly, about to ride off—"I'll buy anything you got! ANYTHING!" Funny in that place to hear the long wailing sing-song of the cigarette vendors, which as the evening drags on becomes simply: "America!"

Rome, Sept. 3—Almost impossible to find a book of Silone's in the shops, but everyone goes at him constantly—as if he were not simply a legend brought from overseas who writes "bad Italian," but a convenience to everyone's sense of superiority. It is very tiring to hear him knocked down with the same contemptuous phrases by every literary creature one meets. Even C., who does those little articles and cartoons for the Socialist press, and may fairly be described as an amiable hack of not overpowering gifts, loves to discourse on the "outside world's" absurd overestimation of Silone—it puts him right in style, and gives him the only point of contact he has with opinion outside Italy. "You people cannot imagine how crudely he writes," and screwing up his shoulders with that well-worn Mediterranean gesture which denotes some intractable human error or folly, takes up the argument after everyone at the table had given it up as hopeless: "Silone! Always Silone! You people have never heard of anyone else!"

He writes, it seems, badly; he is a "political," not really a man of letters—a deputy, an active Socialist, editor of his own political weekly, etc.; he does not shine in conversation, but is in fact a depressed and depressing character; his reputation is out of all proportion to the real situation in Italian writing. The main point, obviously, is that Italian intellectuals are not disposed to honor a novelist who has been pushed at them as a symbol of the "real," the anti-Fascist, Italy. Curious situation: on the one hand there is a certain defensiveness about compliance with a regime which only the boldest cared to defy head-on, and which, as they say, "was after all, not so bad as Hitler. You have no idea how easygoing it was. With us, even authoritarian government is always a little bit of a joke." I have noticed that even Gaetano Salvemini's return has aroused mixed feelings—"he criticizes too much." On the other hand, whatever moral debt some Italians may have incurred for Fascism, none of them is likely to feel any great repentance now, considering the misery into which so many have been plunged after being bombed, pillaged, and cheated up and down the peninsula. They are understandably furious with those Anglo-Americans who were Mussolini's really *sincere* admirers, and then worked their precious moral

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superiority both ways—denouncing them first for Fascism and then laughing at them for its ineffectuality. The modern Italians are, anyway, oversensitive on every question of prestige, and are now even more so, with so much of the country's economy pinned to the black market. They are annoyed with those who approach them on set political lines—who go around like L., that proverbial American liberal, saying in effect: "Your country is beautiful and I have the greatest admiration for your leading writers, Mr. Dante and Mr. Silone. But are *you* quite free of sin?"

Mrs. C. told me that *Fontamara* was a terrible book and that the first she had seen of it was an Italian edition sent over especially by Silone's English publisher—not easy for them to take that! And he is not a "literary" writer, a deep matter in a country where style works on writers like a narcotic. ("My greatest pleasure," said A., who is very intelligent, "is spending a morning polishing my paragraphs.") So Silone is considered a gross writer, and with so much of his time taken up with inter-Socialist politics, a curiosity. Yet harsh and peculiarly personal as so many of these attacks are—essential to Italian self-esteem—there *is* a curious muddleheadedness to Silone which I can see more clearly here than I could at home. He has gone through an intense religious evolution without getting out of the shell of party Marxism, and up to recently kept up with Nenni and the anti-Communist opposition in the Socialist movement out of some vague idea of reconciling them. But essentially, as P. says, he is disliked because he personifies the one type the Italians cannot take—the moral dissenter. "He simply will not reduce everything to the canonical Italian level of the 'family affair.' " Similarly one can see that the personal character of his Socialism represents more and more a longing to get back to the immediate human relatedness with peasants and artisans he enjoyed in his early days in the Abruzzi. What I have always loved in Silone is his feeling for the bottom people—a fact that would be equally admired in Italy if he did not let the intellectuals feel that he is making dour ethical judgments on *them*. But the peasant types whom Carlo Levi described in *Christ Stopped At Eboli* with such easy detachment, creatures of living mythology and native farce, are to Silone just those "who do not betray." He may be muddled and intolerably gloomy, but he is striking out for unfashionable values. In Catholic Italy it is very queer to take Christianity that seriously.

Sept. 5—Rome keeps eluding me, as Florence never did, or even Assisi—the one almost too perfectly pure in style, the other simply mysterious, lost to our age like a buried city. I knew in Assisi that I

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must remain outside it, that I could not reach across that wall of old sacredness, and was content to be amazed and to go away. But Rome makes everything initially so easy and yet ends by being the greatest enigma of all.

And this is not because the past has made a camouflage city over the "real" one, an historic patina barring the depths to the city's inner life. I had expected it to be so, but what is astonishing here is the realization that all these streets and streets of gray, Baroque church fronts, old stones, arches, inscriptions, temples, palaces are casually interwoven with the greater modern city and are entirely lacking in the "picturesque." The city is not *grand*. Except for that hideous birthday cake, the Vittorio Emanuele monument, and the great sweeping roads which Mussolini erected to the Colosseum, there is nothing imperious about Rome as there is about Washington or the Paris laid out by Baron Haussmann. The greater part of it has a softly informal quality, as if the stone had rotted over the dark cramped streets like vegetation, and the overripe gourds of Baroque churches had begun to melt at the edges, emitting a thin juice of blood and dirt. The city always seems small without ever being compact. It was not until I came to the Pincio along the park, and looked down on the city, with its domes, obelisks, and spires upflashing in the sun like an heraldic coat of arms, that I realized how enormous are those churches which, when you pass their doors, seem to obtrude, each over its little front of street, like an old chatelaine barring the way.

It is perhaps just this long inner weathering, softening, crampening that makes the city immediately so *easy*, as if it had been used up and used up, generation after generation, and now had no pretense with anyone. Yet it is in this very blandness and intimacy with which Rome takes you in, this lack of outward "surface," that ambiguity begins. Here the remains of the successive generations have been piled up and piled up with such indifference that they finally melt into equivalent phases of the same weariness with time. People say: "How amazing that the various periods blend so well." How amazing, rather, that the city should still be able to absorb them all and keep us equidistant in time from each. The obelisk in the Piazza del Popolo is as "Roman" now as the great stone goddess dumped into a corner of the courtyard of the Palazzo Venezia; the statue of Marcus Aurelius in the Campidoglio, the Palazzo Farnese, the temple of the vestal virgins along the Tiber, that great heap of Latin Rome set up like a goldfish bowl in the middle of the Piazza Argentina, those Baroque churches on the Corso, behind those sooty fronts of European gray which always look

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as if they had been trod over by millions of feet in the long procession of Christendom, churches where the gilt and coiled pillars writhe and mount in irreversible dreams of splendor, in a style that summons back the death agony of empires—all, seen week after week, take on an impossible unity of experience. Returning late last night along the Via del Babbuino, I noticed in the corridor of a small house a wall decorated with shards off some Roman wall, and had this strange picture in my mind of Rome today wearing its own past as slyly as a savage decked out in the glass beads and metal crucifixes donated by missionaries.

Nov. 8—E. T., whom I used to see in that 23rd Street cafeteria scribbling away at his anti-Fascist novels, and was almost the type of the Italian anarchist, with his unworldliness, his ungovernable *brio,* his fifteen or seventeen years of prison under Mussolini, and his fierce dislike of Communist totalitarians (he even spent some weeks on Riker's Island for beating one up), has since his deportation suddenly blossomed out as the C.P.'s anti-American expert. I have been reading in *L'Unità* an article by him which announces the following facts to the Italian proletariat: (1) Truman is a gangster; (2) This is so because he got his political start from the Pendergast gang in Kansas City; (3) There used to be a Capone gang in Chicago, and Chicago is very near Kansas City; (4) There is also a Tammany gang in New York, which is connected with political gangs in Washington and Chicago; (5) Q.E.D., America is dominated by gangsters.

Nov. 15—Our "landlord," Prince L., has gone off for a few days and there is a meek little retired sea captain in his studio who is elaborately deferent to us on all occasions. Came over to my window this morning and asked me to have a coffee with him, to discuss the writer's problems. He is doing a fantasy on the Third World War, the point of which is that America will assuredly lose it. Not a Communist but an old-fashioned liberal—"my only politics is Italy." But he has soaked up the C.P. line with such thoroughness that I can spare myself much study by listening to him. All strikes are forbidden in America; Lewis was put in jail for starting one; Negroes are lynched weekly in New York and Chicago; the ruling class is itching to use the atom bomb on Russia, and will drop some on Italy if the workers seize power. Russia? He shrugs: a far-off country, run by Oriental despots; it does not interest him; he is *not* a Communist. But America has all the wealth and all the ships and all the bombs and is mad to rule the world. "You may be amiable, but you have everything and we have nothing."

Dec. 1—Dinner with Silone and Carlo Levi in a sweltering mob at the pizzeria *Re degli Amici*—accordion players, Neapolitan blues

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singers, a grotesque one-man band loaded front and back with instruments and beating time to the upward and downward surge of a rusty black derby squeezed over his eyes, wandering beggars and nuns collecting alms. Sociability unlimited, the café of all good Roman artists, Socialists, and Actionists—the beautiful Italian bedlam and intellectual merriment, people calling and flirting from table to table: all one great family party. Always at such moments, as when walking the streets at noon and feeling the relatedness of people to each other, the family motif binding Italians together seems stronger than the personality of each one. I keep thinking of a dance on the village green.

Even Silone looked almost gay tonight, though taking advantage of Levi's valiant efforts to speak English, which he pretends not to understand at all, he put his face in a great mass of fish, meat, and greens, and remained dolorously alone with his own thoughts. Levi in his most resplendent mood and most carefree costume, with a crazy fur cap given him by a Florentine carriage driver and a long checked overcoat straight out of Harold Teen. Falstaff in a zoot suit, grinning from ear to ear, the most pagan of all the Jews. He looks like a Roman senator out on the street, and glad of it. Everything interests him, every strand in Italian politics, art, and gossip runs through his hands as he talks. As he sits there, papa at the head of the table, sighing one minute for the New York girls, the other relating stories of Florence under the occupation, imperturbably self-centered as a child but bringing up light and gaiety on all possible subjects by his delight in his appetites and his own mind, one thinks of Bacon's discovery that *the plant, man, grows more vigorous in Italy.* Paints in the morning, writes in the afternoon, rounds out his day with a cartoon for *Italia socialista,* and then makes his grand entrance here, an old stogy in his mouth, amiable as a Congressman back home on Main Street—the pinnacle of Italian self-enjoyment. Tells me with enormous relish that he did a cartoon satirizing Nenni lost in the Communist jungle, and that Nenni, misunderstanding, called up to congratulate him. Reports that the people he described in *Christ Stopped At Eboli,* which recounts his confinement for three years under Fascism, have taken to wearing markers on their clothes reading: "I am a character in Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped At Eboli.*" What will you have? It is a marvelous people, the Italians! And he sits there, roaring his head off, making eyes at every pretty girl who passes. The years have hardly worn at him; he shares in everything and belongs to no one—it has all gone into a *bouillabaisse* of experience—the times in and out of prison, the period of exile in Lucania when, as a political prisoner with no other way of reaching the people but his

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early training as a physician, he discovered for the Italians themselves the most impoverished and beaten section of the peasantry; and now postwar Rome, out of which he protrudes with undiminished force, and every aspect of whose life he makes seem as local to his own as if he were the neighborhood scribe, writing letters for all the peasants in the village.

Curious to watch Silone and Levi together—both men of the same generation, both formed entirely outside the shell of Fascism and characteristically better known in other countries than in their own, fundamental types of the writer "engaged" to action, yet so different in mind and temperament that the extremes of the Italian character have been called on to produce them—the one awkwardly self-conscious, soured with political and literary disappointments ("He has been told so often he is a bad novelist," M. says, "he is ready to believe it"), but a man who defends sadly the most creative urgings of our age; the other riding the crest of the wave, hearty and ineffably self-assured, relying on his Italianism for every experience. In the "outside world" people are beginning to compare them, to find in them tokens of the "new" Italy; here the formula simply doesn't operate—the Silone one knows is not to be found in a crazy-quilt evening, but in his work, with its scruples, its awkward tenderness, and its humor—and the work is no longer separable here from Italy; it is one more chapter in the inner history of the Italian masses.

And afterwards, toiling home through the cold, stopping for an *espresso,* admiring the nymphs in the Piazza del Popolo, a bag of chestnuts from the old woman on the corner warming herself at the fire, while in the faint light of the lamps in the park, just beyond Michelangelo's gates, that Roman god and emperor whose name I have never learned still stands with his arm half-raised, beautiful and indifferent.

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Josephine Herbst

MISS PORTER AND MISS STEIN

Which is the "real" Gertrude Stein? Her portrait by Picasso now on view at the Museum of Modern Art or the Miss Stein in the article by Katherine Anne Porter in *Harper's Magazine,* December, 1947?

In feeling and attitude toward their subject the painter and writer appear to be at opposite poles. There is nothing false in the details that Miss Porter selects; each might have been verified by Miss Stein herself. The chosen facts are assembled with wit and presented in flawless prose; the given features are correct. But what is wrong with the expression? What features are missing?

Miss Porter frankly admits that her subject has a "horrid fascination" for her; she sees Miss Stein as "one of the blights and symptoms of her very sick times." Picasso's approach to the portrait of Gertrude Stein, however, was not antipathetic. The painting itself recalls a period and it is exactly this background and its significance that Miss Porter blacks out. The portrait was commissioned by Miss Stein in 1905 when Picasso was twenty-four, living in poverty in a Montmartre tenement. He had just finished the famous series of circus acrobats, and the portrait initiated an important new development in his work. During the sittings, Picasso suddenly painted out the whole head, declaring, "I don't see you any longer when I look." That summer he went to Spain, Gertrude Stein to Italy. When the painter returned, he painted in the head without having seen her again. Between the painting out and the painting in a great change had come to Picasso's art and the two styles survive in the work; the naturalistic method of the background and the face in the new style, suggesting a sculptured mask with boldly drawn features similar to the faces seen in ancient Spanish sculpture. Miss Stein was then working on *Three Lives,* Cubism was being born, Cézanne had just died. The posthumous exhibition of Cézanne's paintings was held in Paris in 1907 and not long after, Stieglitz opened 291 in New York. It was not until 1913 that the American public had a chance at the post-Impressionists; they were received with howling

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derision. Henry James was still writing for the "happy few." Both Stein and Picasso were straining for new mutations in the creative arts, and one has only to keep in mind the stale academic rigidity that prevailed in the painting and writing of the period to acknowledge the tremendous influence both the painter and writer exerted in their respective fields. The question that has now arisen is whether this was a "good" or a "bad" influence, and the argument extends far beyond the subject of Miss Stein.

In brief, Miss Porter presents Miss Stein as a gloomy, low-pressure, possessive slug, eating her way through a leaf, with two major obsessions, Money and Success. Picasso emerges as one of Miss Stein's possessions, not as a fellow artist in an exciting, mutual venture. Miss Toklas, her dogs, her paisley shawls, even the GI's are impaled on the pincushion of Miss Stein's world as exclusively her own. Her life experience would appear to have been little more than the glutton dream of a greedy egomaniac; her quarrels, personal stigmata.

Picasso's portrait obliges us to confront the actual woman and the period. The mouth is generous, not avaricious, the whole being is saturated with patience and eagerness, two qualities most enjoined by Miss Stein herself. There are the Oriental head and fine eyes to which Miss Porter also gives due admiration. The Picasso woman is vast, solid, and egotistical, but one must ask what kind of ego is made manifest? What goal did it serve? Fortunately, we have Gertrude Stein's work and the evidence of the period as a corrective for any bias either portrait contains; we have the added evidence of a recent Yale *Gazette* with a documentation of her correspondence which indicates that she was generous not only with her mind but often with her cash. The human frailties that Miss Porter indicates are not peculiar to Miss Stein, even if true. Balzac never forgot the franc, Dickens may have been a brute to his wife and Dostoevsky a reactionary. It is profitable to examine even monstrous traits insofar as they explain a connection between a state of being and a work of art. Does Miss Porter's Miss Stein reveal the source of her direction or its value within the framework of a period or the substance of an achievement?

Picasso brought to his subject the illumination of a great innovator. Miss Porter comes with the last sad decades firmly in mind, forgetting the significant origin of the innovation and miscalculating the sequence of the evil. She sees only "irresponsible" chaos in Miss Stein's prose and, by implication, places a certain moral condemnation upon it as contributing to the prevailing disorder. Curiously enough, Miss Porter's verdict recalls a review of Miss Stein's *Wars I Have Seen*

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by an OWI propagandist, published in the *New York Times* when the book appeared. Only one aspect of Miss Stein was discussed, her "frivolity." A writer like Miss Stein had many aspects; but frivolity is not her prevailing mood. Like that other egomaniac, Walt Whitman, an intellectual bent seems to have been accompanied by a nonrational urge in the same direction. Both were impelled to identify themselves with "everybody," and, in a long, often tedious, Sears Roebuck cataloging, to explain everybody to everyone. Both often appear to be seeking frantically for an elusive "somebody" in the "everybody" of public crowds; both fill up lines with instantaneous, nonliterary expressions, flinging them up carelessly, as personally, intimately, freshly, as a child sees; both were caught up in the crowds of war, paying less attention to events and programs than to the elements beneath. Whitman discovered the anonymous "unknown" soldier; Stein, the anonymous civilian who is neither always heroic nor always afraid but who eats, sleeps, scrambles for food, looks for hopeful portents, awaits events, resists, and sometimes succumbs to the enemy. If we accept the Porter version of Miss Stein's salon, it appears only as the paradox of an experience that was in general unusually democratic, oddly equalitarian for a writer who has often been identified with esoteric snobbism. By what standard of responsibility is she to be measured? By Silone or Malraux? By Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells? Is Glenway Wescott's *Apartment in Athens,* which the author acknowledged was his "contribution to the war effort," to be the standard, and are we to accept its historical distortions? Even a few names suffice to indicate the difficulty. In her chosen orbit, Gertrude Stein was responsible, and more may be learned from her failures than from any number of glittering, successful works patterned on models with which we are familiar. She was under the spell of the private life that goes on whether there is justice or injustice, struggle or ennui, and she hoped by abolishing the chronological sequence to express life by its values only.

There are no Dali snails crawling over corpses in Stein's prose; no descent into degenerative processes solely for the thrill. If her influence was pernicious, where is it to be found? In the banalities of Hollywood, the brutality of best sellers? Various writers proclaimed their indebtedness to the laboratory methods of her prose; Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, Thornton Wilder, to name three. Miss Porter's portrait would seem more convincing if she detailed this evidence; she implies that Miss Stein's chief followers were "ill-mannered" brats from the Middle West, intent on sex and rum, and who had "never read a book." This has a witty ring, but is it true? Is the *lumpen illiterati* determined

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by geography? Is it true that *transition* and Miss Stein were inseparable components of a muddled "occultism" and that the lack of a mother tongue betrayed them both? Muddled as Jolas was editorially, he printed Joyce's *Work in Progress,* and Miss Porter concedes that Joyce had a mother tongue. Jolas even printed Miss Porter. The hospitality of *transition* accounts for diversified creative efforts as well as for senseless mouthings now sunk in the sands.

One becomes nostalgic for that hospitality even with its muddle. Some irresponsibility must be allowed the artist in a world geared to collective uniformity; singularity needs to be safeguarded, not feared. This is no argument for a detachment that pays no heed to a moral climate. It may be the time to re-examine a trend, but in what spirit is this to be undertaken? What goal is it to serve? The entire field of modern art is now under fire and one should say, in justice to Miss Porter, that there is no evidence of an intention to share in the general attack. The fact remains that her charge of "irresponsibility" is echoed by less scrupulous persons in broadsides against modern art and writing without distinction between the sham and the genuine, without defining the ends to be served.

Is there any relevance in the fact that Hitler condemned modern art and burned the books? In effect, he made art a public enemy, almost as guilty as the Jews. Nor did Joyce's mother tongue spare him from the necessity of fleeing Paris when the Nazis came. During the war the impulse to name a guilty party induced a group of writers, led by Archibald MacLeish, to cite as "irresponsible" such writers as Joyce, Proust, D. H. Lawrence, and T. S. Eliot. Van Wyck Brooks sponsored Longfellow and Lowell as safe democratic carriers. Magazines and newspapers currently define modern art as "subversive," as a "racket," "degenerate," and "irresponsible." The trustees of the Institute of Modern Art in Boston have just repudiated the word "modern," substituting "contemporary"; as outlined by the trustees, the principles laid down for future policy have a familiar, unholy sound. On February 12, the *New York Times* reported that the Central Committee of the Communist Party had denounced Russia's three leading composers for displaying antidemocratic leanings, for ideological errors, and for utilizing atonality rather than melody. Seven "irresponsible" composers were ordered to return to the "great Russian traditions in music." A month previously, the writer Fadayev was obliged to admit his "errors" and to accept the corrections as "sound, fatherly" advice. Nor does fatherly advice stop with the arts; an important economist was bawled out for his considered findings on the state of capitalism in the Western World.

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How responsible some of the local attacks upon irresponsibility are, can be seen from an examination of *Mona Lisa's Moustache,* a recent work so vulgarly contrived that it would be idiotic to give it attention if it had not been hailed by several reviewers as the final sane word on an "insane subject." Gibbings treats the Duchamp "Mona Lisa with a Moustache" as a painting. He interprets Gauguin as an exhibitionist who repudiated a business career for a hedonistic exploration of the dark "occult" forces of the South Seas; his painting, as insane jargon. The author, an interior decorator, misstates facts; once, indeed, in a radio broadcast, he claimed that Hitler was not opposed to modern art but only to a few Russian "bolshevik" specimens. In the course of furthering his contention that there is a connection between Nazi degeneracy and modern art, he imputes the fall of France to Picasso's "Guernica"!

One should take a good look at "Guernica." Picasso was no Vansittart. The bull that has gone raging mad, tearing down the city, ripping terrified bodies to fragments, does not signify a specified "people." Picasso indicts a virulent principle, the leader run amuck, gone mad with a power that has turned his victims to stone. The bull may be Franco; it is the dictator, triumphant, wherever he may be found, under any name. That this painting, with its tremendous significance for our time, should be misinterpreted as a symbol for a people's degeneracy is a symptom of someone's malaise. It was a sign of health that Gertrude Stein could say, "I write for myself and strangers."

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ART CHRONICLE

IRRELEVANCE VERSUS IRRESPONSIBILITY

The recent questioning of the validity of modern painting in this, its post-Cubist stage—as we see such questioning, for instance, in Geoffrey Grigson's article, "Authentic and False in the New 'Romanticism'," in the March *Horizon* and in the remarks quoted indirectly therein from Gide and the late Coomaraswamy—reflects again the fallacies to which any criticism of a non-literary art commits itself when it relies largely on discourse, and when, in addition, the amateur's distance is assumed to be adequate to serious discussion. Once again we hear that by devoting himself to means instead of ends the contemporary advanced artist has reduced himself to a technician, performer, virtuoso, at best a mere exponent of his own sensibility, whose work must lack real "human" import.

Modern art lacks a subject (end), lacks "humanity," etc.—how many cultivated people, literary men in particular, go on complaining this way. Thirty years ago their similars, with an equal incomprehension of the point of modern art, were so excited by the novelty of the phenomenon itself that they were willing to suspend the traditional demands for subject and form, purpose and treatment, means and ends; whether or not they realized what it was all about, they had a categorical enthusiasm for the "modern" that stilled their qualms. And regardless of the damage this uncritical attitude may have done in some areas, it was on the whole a lucky thing for modern art, for without the busy support of the amateurs of novelty in the teens and twenties it would have had much more difficulty in getting itself accepted. But times have changed again, and modern painting and sculpture have now drifted into one of the most precarious of all positions: that of a familiar phenomenon whose familiarity has not made it any the less baffling, a phenomenon moreover that continues to resist the literary approach. And when one remembers that for the average cultivated person in our society the literary approach is the standard one with respect to all the arts, then the position of modern painting and sculpture is seen to be precarious indeed.

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Yet painting and sculpture have always been in a somewhat anomalous position. Whereas the point of music *qua* art is usually unmistakeable enough, in practice if not in theory, that of painting and sculpture is more often than not missed by the very people who sincerely enjoy them. If the relative standings of the artists of the past have been established for the record correctly in the main, the grounds on which this has been done still remain more inaccessible to discourse than those governing the criticism even of music. *"Apprendre à voir,"* said the Goncourt brothers, *"est le plus long apprentissage de tous les arts."* Does not even Valéry (in *Choses vues,* a selection from which, translated by William Geoffrey, appears in the spring *Kenyon Review*) complain that the "object of painting is uncertain" and in his further remarks demonstrate how, even in the case of this enthusiast of painting, the literary approach prevented him from fully experiencing this art. And, incidentally, was the literary approach to art in general ever put more succinctly, if unwittingly, than when Valéry writes of music: "I conclude that the real connoisseur in this art is necessarily he to whom it suggests nothing"? As though, when the verb "suggests" takes for its objects the relatively conceptualized images Valéry has in mind, the same does not apply to painting and sculpture.

The French writers of the generation after Valéry's who so enthusiastically welcomed Cubism and its aftermath did so for the most part with a magnificent incomprehension that does not seem to have interfered with their *élan.* But we who write in English lack that uninhibited rhetorical exuberance which permits contemporary Frenchmen to be so irresponsible toward their subject matter whenever it happens to be art—and anyhow we make ourselves ridiculous if we try to imitate it. When we sit down to write about art we apply ourselves with an earnestness that, in the absence of a real familiarity with the medium or of a special interest like iconography, makes us grow querulous in the end. This querulousness is not confined to journalists and the editors of art magazines. A writer as enlightened as Mr. Grigson can feel thwarted enough to reproach modern art for its failure to be affirmative, noble, human, universal, etc. And it is significant that Gide, distinguished among all contemporary French writers by his lack of rhetoric and disdaining the face-saving levity with which most of his colleagues address themselves to art, can utter a similar reproach. Nevertheless, in art irresponsibility is often preferable to irrelevance, and at the moment, Mr. Grigson's or Gide's irrelevance does more harm than, say, Sartre's catalogue blurbs.

"Play-boy of means" is what Mr. Grigson calls the modern artist.

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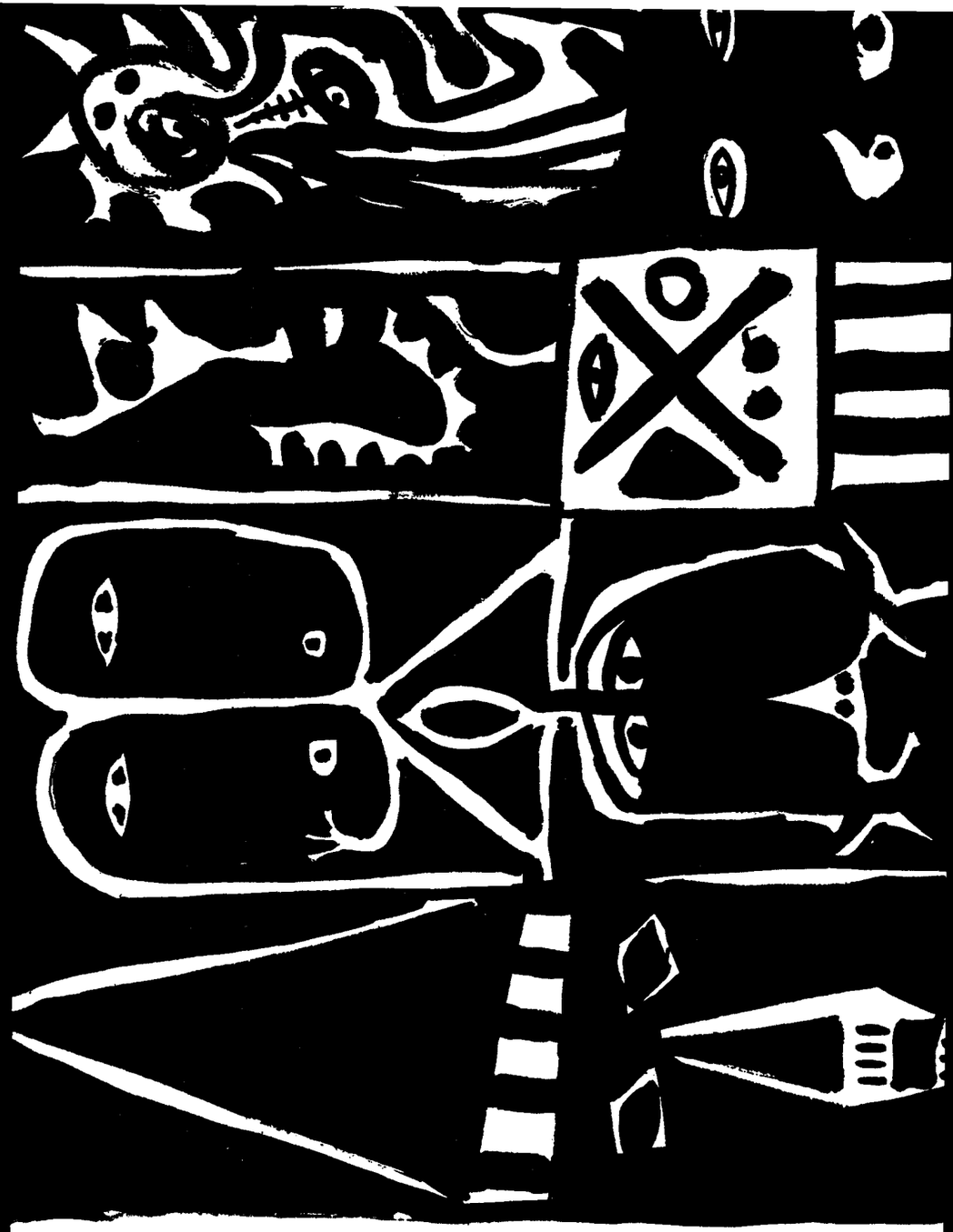

TOP

PICTOGRAPH (1948) by Adolph Gottlieb. Pen and Ink. 12" x 15". Courtesy of the Kootz Gallery.

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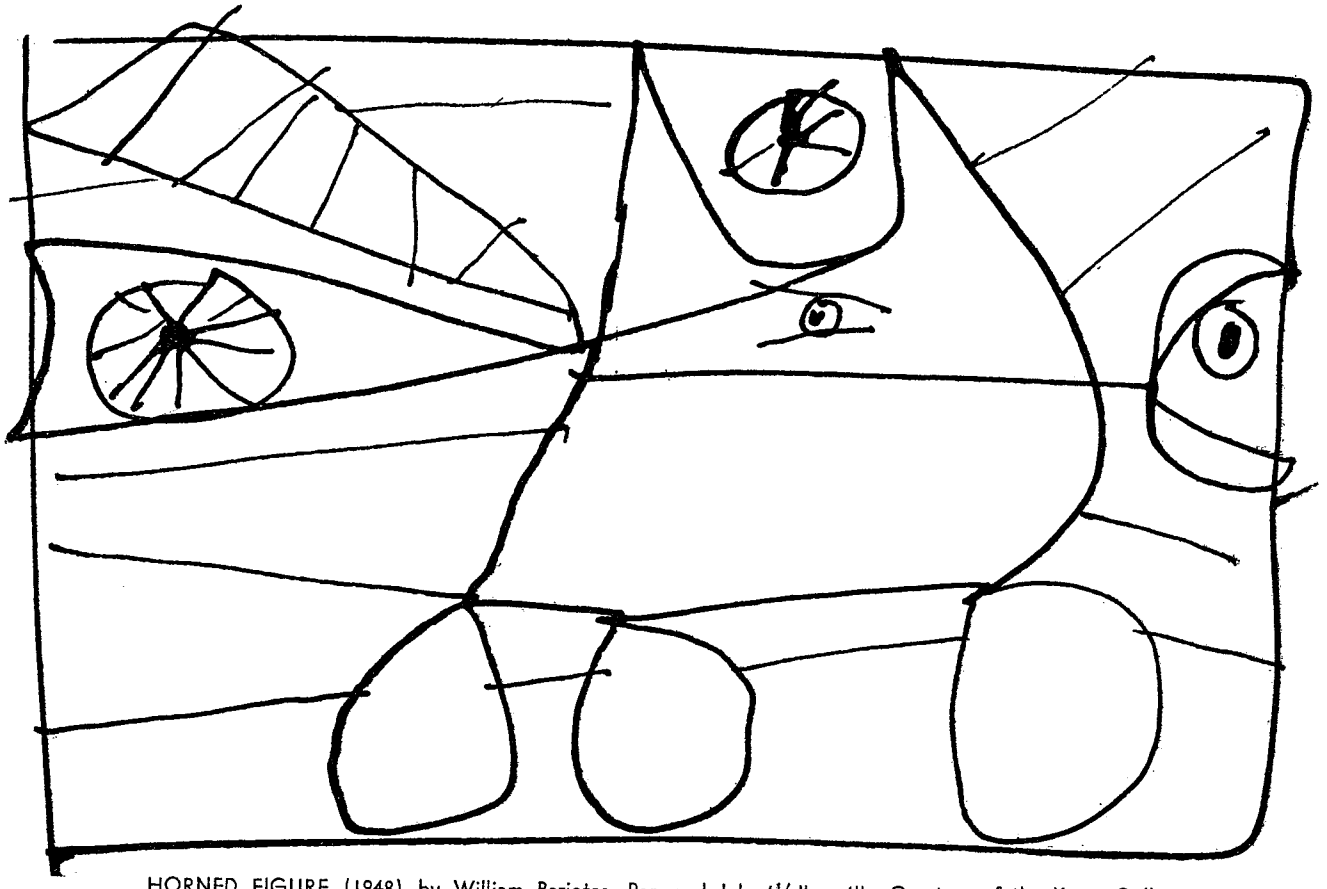

HORNED FIGURE (1948) by William Baziotes. Pen and Ink. 6½" x 4". Courtesy of the Kootz Gallery.

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"Painters need order; they need subject; which is another way of affirming that they need viable ends." Here in America our familiarity, not to say our obsession, with means teaches us that, though a means may be without an end, it can never be without a result or consequence. And art is essentially a matter of means and results, not of means and ends: for no one has ever been able to point out the ends or purposes of art with the finality any artist would need were he to take Mr. Grigson's advice and go in search of ends. If, however, by ends Mr. Grigson really means content and wants to reproach modern art for lack of it, then he has missed the whole point.

Must one argue this all over again? The message of modern art, abstract or not, Matisse's, Picasso's, or Mondrian's, is precisely that means are content. Pigment and its abstract combinations on canvas are as important as delineated forms; matter—colors and the surfaces on which they are placed—is as important as ideas. Human activity embodies its own ends and no longer makes them transcendental by postponing them to afterlife or old age. All experience is sanctified, all we can know is the best we can know. These may be errors, just as the myths of religion are errors, but they are capable of producing an art just as profound and "human" as that which incorporated the myths of religion.

The inability to perceive "human" content in modern art means ultimately the inability to perceive the point of painting and sculpture in general. Mr. Grigson will allow Auden to say "love" in an oblique way, and not a painter, simply because he can always recognize the word, "love," for what it means, but has trouble deciphering paint. Abstract art is effective on the same basis as all previous art and can convey a content equally important or equally unimportant; there is no difference in principle. On the other hand, it is possible to assert—and the assertion has not been effectively refuted so far—that the great masters of the past achieved their art by virtue of combinations of pigment whose real effectiveness was "abstract," and that their greatness is not owed to the spirituality with which they conceived the things they illustrated so much as it is to the success with which they ennobled raw matter to the point where it could function as art.

Mr. Grigson's call for "viable ends" and common, universal humanity in contemporary painting and sculpture (as if anything worthy of the name of art does not strive necessarily for a maximum of humanity and universality) is echoed in essence if not at all in style by a long article called "Aspects of Two Cultures" appearing in Number 52 of the *VOKS Bulletin,* a cultural magazine published in Moscow in English

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—among other languages—by the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. The author of the article is the magazine's editor, Vladimir Kemenov, whose pen, if not mind, functions in a subcellar of consciousness a Neanderthal man would have shrunk from entering. Mr. Kemenov attacks contemporary "bourgeois" art indiscriminately, sparing neither abstract art nor neo-realism and taking in everything in between (though he is careful never to use the word "academic"). Aside from the unbelievable level of intellectual probity on which it is written, Mr. Kemenov's article is remarkable for its insinuations to the effect that our country is now the chief promoter of "decadent" art (Dali and Sir Kenneth Clark are called Americans, and it is pointed out that Lipchitz has spent a "long time" in this country).

Mr. Kemenov accuses modern art of trying to convince the working man "that he is no more than a conglomeration of mechanical parts . . . or else a biological creature possessing purely animal instincts and desires." Lipchitz is said to be a "representative of that tendency in modern bourgeois art which utterly perverts the image of man, distorting his body, violating measure and proportion, emphasizing his animal nature." Picasso's art is called "an aesthetic apologetics for capitalism" despite his own "professed sympathy for the struggle of democracy against fascism." The Impressionists and Cézanne also get theirs in passing, being accused of one-sided "rationalism."

Mr. Kemenov goes on to say that modern art is pathological, insane, mystical, irrational, escapist, etc. But it is to be noted that throughout the article he, or at least his translator, avoids the term, "degenerate art," perhaps because the Nazis used to apply it so regularly to modern art. This does not, however, prevent him from adding that the latter is a "fantastic mixture of unwholesome fantasy and fraud," "worthless nonsense," "a mixture of pathology and chicanery" tracing its origins to "daubs painted by the donkey's tail." But even our "realistic" art is only "quasi-realistic. . . . Its purpose is to put a veneer on bourgeois reality."

Mr. Kemenov says that the decadence and deterioration of modern bourgeois art (it used to be better in the nineteenth century, he admits, when it was realistic and closer to the people) are such that it is unable to produce good war propaganda; only imported Soviet music, movies, and posters could "spiritually" mobilize people in this country and Britain against Hitler during the war. "As opposed to decadent bourgeois art, divorced from the people, hostile to the interests of the democratic masses, permeated with biological individualism and mysticism, Soviet artists present an art created for the people, inspired by the thoughts, feelings, and achievements of the people, and which in its turn enriches the people

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with its lofty ideas and noble images." Although Mr. Kemenov does not name a single Soviet painter or sculptor, he also writes: "Young Soviet art has already created works of world-wide significance. . . . Soviet art is advancing along the true path indicated by the genius of Stalin." Since it would be hard to say that Mr. Kemenov is irresponsible, we have to conclude that he, too, is irrelevant.

The truly new horror of our times is not, perhaps, totalitarianism as such, but the vulgarity it is able to install in places of power—the official vulgarity, the certified vulgarity:

> "From low to high doth dissolution climb,
> And sink from high to low. . . . "

Clement Greenberg

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THE ATONAL TRAIL: A COMMUNICATION

Atonality or Dodecatonalism as a system of musical composition is, as everyone knows, a product of Central Europe. As such it had from the outset the earmarks of a Messianic cult and a determinist religion. Like the Bauhaus, Gestalt philosophy, Antroposophy, and many other Central European "currents" of the teens and twenties, it had its God or Master, its prophets and apostles, its interpretation of history, its fervent adepts and converts and its no less fervent financial backers. However, until the late twenties the movement was essentially limited to Central Europe, and only a handful of composers outside of this realm were converted to the Schönbergian system of musical composition. Schönberg, Berg, Wellecz, and other Viennese composers, adherents full or in part of the twelve-tone system of composition, were naturally well known to everyone concerned with new music. Their theories were discussed, their music carefully studied.

The ideological conflict between the converts to the twelve-tone system and the adherents of the principle of tonal or modal composition raged in musical periodicals all over Europe in the twenties. In most of this controversy the Schönberg adepts centered their attacks against the work of Igor Stravinsky, whose rejection of any "system" as a basis for composition quite naturally put him at the opposite pole of the dodecatonal cult. However, towards the end of the twenties the debate between tonalists and atonalists subsided and it seemed that everyone concerned (*not* the "large" public) had thoroughly understood the principles of atonality and the twelve-tone system. A few composers adopted them in their entirety, most of the others accepted them only partially (as a further emancipation of dissonance) but everyone seemed to feel that the problem of atonality was a closed issue. It was understood to be the last consequence drawn from an evolution of chordal harmony which had first started somewhere around 1600 (with the *first* emancipation of dissonance in the works of the early Italian

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opera composers, Peri, Cavaliere, and Monteverde) and from the consequent adoption of equal-temperament tuning as the basis of Western music. As such it entered and without doubt enriched the vocabulary of most twentieth-century composers. However, as a system of composition it was rejected by most contemporary composers. Only a small group of initiates led by Schönberg adopted the twelve-tone technique in its entirety and by attempting to present it to the public as a "new" system, rather than a final step in a harmonic evolution, they created a strange kind of fetish, a hermetic cult, mechanistic in its technique and depressingly dull to the uninitiated listener. Now, twenty years later, the debate of atonality versus tonality is sporadically revived by the promoters of the Schönbergian doctrine. This time the revival has taken place in France and in America. In France it is a part of a general infiltration of "Mittel-europa" ideas into the "cora" of French civilization, an infiltration which has been going on for some ten to fifteen years. In America, its revival is due to the fact that many Central European issues have been imported here as a corollary to the immigration of their protagonists. Here the debate found an attentive and fertile soil in the "lecture tour pattern" of incoming intellectuals or in the broader American pattern—the desire for "education" and "appreciation."

Most of the revival of this debate is just so much rehash of settled issues—a kind of cafeteria dinner consisting of stale clam chowder and faded mixed-fruit salad. It has neither much intrinsic meaning, nor does it contribute in any way to the progress of musical thinking. Usually it reflects a great deal of "standardized" confusion of terms, lack of true knowledge of music history, a traditionally erroneous interpretation of the evolution of musical language and a both biased and arbitrary rejection of all modern musical production which is not written according to the dodecatonal method (see Mr. Kurt List's appallingly arrogant and superficial article in the January issue of PR). But what is worse, this revival of a settled debate shows a lack of new ideas and *therefore* a return to the ideas of the twenties. All this is part of the retrospective, impotent attitude which is now so apparent in most phases of cultural and political life in Europe.

One of the most zealous propagandists of atonality and the twelve-tone technique is the French critic and composer René Leibowitz. For some time he has been a regular contributor to Mr. Sartre's magazine *Les Temps Modernes*. There, Mr. Leibowitz has been leading a twofold campaign: (1) a defense of the dodecatonal system and its Master, and (2) an attack on Stravinsky and those composers (and there are many) who do not accept the dodecatonal system as a basis for composition.

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In general Mr. Leibowitz's articles are on a fairly high "cultural" level, though the spurious use of some Existentialist terms inapplicable to music (situation, essence) occasionally obscures his otherwise clear but somewhat naive line of reasoning. Recently Mr. Leibowitz has made a tour in the United States and has, I understand, given the usual visiting foreigner's series of lectures. He has been in Hollywood to pay homage to Schönberg and has also called on Stravinsky. The result of his visit to Hollywood was the article: "Two Composers: A Letter from Hollywood," printed as the Music Chronicle in the March issue of PR.

This peculiar little item warrants a certain amount of attention. Not that the ideas expressed in it are particularly new. Far from it. In a sense it is a rehash of the same old argument—Schönberg versus Stravinsky—which we have read about in most of the articles of the apologists of atonality in the twenties. And yet Mr. Leibowitz takes a detached attitude, and under the cloak of impartiality he attempts to prove the greatness of Schönberg by smearing Stravinsky without either an understanding of the ideas underlying Stravinsky's music or a thorough analysis and comparison of both composers' recent works. On the whole it is a superficial piece, politely vicious and presumptuous and at the same time full of weak and untenable arguments. Mr. Leibowitz begins his piece by stating that it "is probably quite safe to say that the musical activity of the last forty years has evolved essentially under Schönberg's influence." In fact, he (Mr. Leibowitz) doubts whether "there is a single composer" whose work has not been affected by Schönberg even though he might "never actually have heard a note" of Schönberg's music. He ends this candid paragraph by stating that Schönberg's "fantastic innovations have entirely transformed the art of sound through what might be called the emancipation of dissonance."

No one will deny Schönberg's influence which, of course, is enormous and has manifested itself in contemporary music very vividly in the Western world. However it is presumptuous to assert that *all* composers knowingly or unknowingly have experienced this influence. It seems, historically speaking, much more likely and closest to the truth, that the transformation of the language of contemporary music towards a free (or better, "new") use of dissonance has been the result of a spontaneous development which occurred in several countries and in the works of several composers *at the same time* quite independently. To say, for example, that Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* is erroneously accepted as a "caesura in modern harmony" *because* Schönberg drew more radical conclusions in this direction some five to eight years *before* this work was written is the same as saying that the Chinese discovered

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the logarithmal tables around 400 B.C. and that their rediscovery in the seventeenth century is not a caesura in mathematics. Such argumentation does not prove anything. The "caesura in modern harmony" was created by Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps,* regardless of Schönberg's "innovations," because it was the most convincing and imaginative work of that period and has been accepted as such by most contemporary composers. Music history gives us many instances where such "fantastic innovations" were not realized in a convincing way until several years after their invention. (For example, the "fantastic innovations" of the early Italian "monodic" composers. What they innovated around 1590 was fully and convincingly realized only around 1605-1607 in the great works of Monteverde.) Similarly, the innovations of K.P.E. Bach and the Manheimer School in the 1750's came to full realization some twenty years later in the works of Haydn and Mozart. It all goes to say that "pioneering" in art is not necessarily the thing that counts. What counts is the convincing "work of art" which establishes the style, the tradition, and ultimately the cast of a historical period. Pioneering in music is only interesting for historians and musicologists but not to history itself and certainly not to the public.

Actually the innovations of Schönberg may have seemed "fantastic" at the time they were formulated, but looking at them historically and judging them by their intrinsic contribution to the evolution of the musical language, they are neither "fantastic" nor revolutionary. They are rather a theoretical conclusion drawn from a development of harmony which began at the turn of the seventeenth century and tortuously but steadily moved on to the beginning of the twentieth century. By basing his whole system on the independent and autonomous use of the twelve semitones within the limit of an octave, Schönberg, in effect, has established a mechanistic basis for the art of music, and has renounced any possibility of an organic foundation for the selection of musical materials. It becomes evident that Schönberg stands at the end of a period rather than at the beginning of a new one. His system is the result of a gradual "emancipation of dissonance," over a period of several hundred years, and not a *deus ex machina* invention of his own.

It is erroneous to measure the quality and permanent value of a composer's work by his influence on his contemporaries. If we were to apply such a criticism, composers such as Meyerbeer in the nineteenth century, and Alberti in the eighteenth century (the inventor of the so-called Alberti bass) should be classed as first-rate composers. Besides, it is an arbitrary statement that "the last forty years have evolved essentially under Schönberg's influence." There were various, and, at

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times, more powerful influences which can be discerned in contemporary music. Certainly, the influence of Stravinsky has been among them.

Mr. Leibowitz remarks that Schönberg inherited the "riches of a century-long evolution which from Bach through Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann on to Brahms, Wagner, and Mahler was based on polyphonic thinking, on functional harmony, on variation." On the other hand, Stravinsky had inherited "some Italian influences" through Glinka but was really brought up in the "atmosphere of the well-known [Russian] 'Five'." It seems to me that the line of tradition indicated by Mr. Leibowitz is rather a declining curve and at the end of the curve, the abandonment of polyphonic thinking is fairly complete. Stravinsky, free from the burden of a declining tradition, has been able to re-establish ties with the true polyphonic thinking of the eighteenth-century tradition.

Mr. Leibowitz elsewhere states that it is more difficult for musicians to follow Schönberg than Stravinsky because Schönberg demands "a sacrifice of arbitrary and hedonistic attitudes." This implies a total misconception of Stravinsky's art, for there has rarely been a composer in the last hundred years who has so completely avoided the arbitrary and the hedonistic as Stravinsky. What escapes Mr. Leibowitz is the fact that Stravinsky is working in a completely new direction. Stravinsky is not concerned with the further evolution of harmony, but with the problem of musical time and its measurement, the function of the interval, the extension of a phrase, the juxtaposition in *time* of several melodic lines. The whole question of time+space+linear and chordal harmony which creates the fourth dimension of music—rhythm—is the real preoccupation of Stravinsky's art. In this, Stravinsky is a real innovator, akin to Monteverde, who also stood at the beginning of a cycle in musical history. If seen from the point of view of the discovery of the "clear and distinct idea" of rhythm (in the full meaning of the word), Stravinsky's music is neither arbitrary nor hedonistic.

As a result of this misconception of what Stravinsky is trying to accomplish in music, Mr. Leibowitz concludes that all Stravinsky's work has been in continual decline since 1912. He says that "behind these frozen and sometimes ready-made patterns . . . there is nothing except perhaps the illusion of music." Mr. Leibowitz should know that most great composers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries always worked with ready-made patterns. In the case of Stravinsky, they are essential because it is against their familiarity that he imparts and expresses his rhythmical discoveries. Without them, the purpose of his artistic discoveries would never be clear.

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Mr. Leibowitz, like many other critics, suffers from a dogmatic acceptance of a biased interpretation of musical history. It seems to me that the traditional division of musical history into four periods: homophonic, polyphonic, monophonic, and harmonic is entirely erroneous. It is an interpretation which confuses the elements of musical language with stylistic periods. Polyphony is by no means a musical element. It is a style of composition. It is a technique concerned with what has been called the "proper and beautiful conjunct motion of melodies." The elements of music are melody, harmony, and rhythm. They are always present in any musical composition. Speaking historically, however, these elements emerged as "clear and distinct" ideas only through a long evolution of Western musical culture. It is this gradual emergence of these three musical elements as conscious ideas which forms the great historical cycles of our musical civilization. At present, the harmonic cycle is declining while the rhythmic cycle is rising out of the exigencies and contingencies of the harmonic past. While Schönberg has carried the harmonic cycle to its logical conclusion, Stravinsky has been investigating, from his *Sacre du Printemps* to his *Third Symphony,* the new domain of rhythm.

Nicolas Nabokov

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EZRA POUND

A few weeks after this advertisement appears New Directions will publish two volumes of the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound. One of them, priced at $5, will include all of the *Cantos* which Pound has completed to date, 1 through 83. The other will include the *Cantos* completed since the last volume of them which we published. These new ones are called *The Pisan Cantos* because they were written during the time Pound was confined in a US Army Prison Camp near Pisa. *The Pisan Cantos* costs $2.75.

Pound is at present confined as a patient in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington. At the hearing on his case held in Federal Court a year ago, leading psychiatrists, testifying as government witnesses, diagnosed Pound's illness as "a paranoid state," and declared that he was not well enough to defend himself in a trial. The doctors at St. Elizabeth's hospital do not believe that he will ever recover sufficiently to be tried on the charges of treason brought against him for making broadcasts from Italy during the War. These same doctors testified that they believed that Pound had been ill for a period of ten years or more. This fact, we believe, should be taken into consideration in making moral judgments about his political actions.

In another sense, Pound's political actions do not concern readers or publishers of poetry. New Directions has never judged the merits of a book by the politics of its author. New Directions has published the great Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, who was until recently a member of the Chilean Senate as an avowed Communist,* and it has published the great novel, *Death on The Installment Plan,* by Louis-Ferdinand Céline, now an exile in Denmark because Leftist elements in France accuse him of tolerating the German Occupation. We have published the German playwright Bertholt Brecht, whose position is about as far Left as you can go,** and we have just published *The Marble Cliffs* of Ernst Juenger, who, before he changed his heart, was writing in a vein philosophically akin to that of the Nazis. In short: the editor of New Directions tries not to confuse political and esthetic judgments.

We sincerely hope that readers and critics will approach *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound with a similar objectivity. Judge them on their merits as poetry, and enjoy them for their beauties as poetry.

New Directions also publishes these other books by Pound: *Polite Essays* (on literary subjects—$2.50); *Personae* (Pound's collected poems apart from *The Cantos*—$3.50); *The Unwobbling Pivot of Confucius* (translation and commentary—$1.00). A *Selected Poems* volume will be ready in late summer, and at some future date there will be a *Selected Essays* volume (edited by T. S. Eliot) and a volume of Pound's translations from the literatures of many languages.

**Residence on Earth.* Spanish texts & English translations by Angel Flores. $3.50.

***The Private Life of The Master Race,* translated by E. R. Bentley. $2.50. *The Trial of Lucullus,* translated by H. R. Hays. 50 cents.

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BOOKS

WELL-INTENTIONED / WELL-EQUIPPED

THE FROZEN SEA: A Study of Franz Kafka. By Charles Neider. Oxford. $3.50.
RAGE FOR ORDER: Essays in Criticism. By Austin Warren. University of Chicago Press. $3.00.
ON THE ILIAD. By Rachel Bespaloff. Translated by Mary McCarthy. Bollingen Series. Pantheon. $2.50.
THE MOMENT AND OTHER ESSAYS. By Virginia Woolf. Harcourt, Brace. $3.00.
THE COMMON READER AND THE SECOND COMMON READER. By Virginia Woolf. Harcourt, Brace. $4.00.

Charles Neider's book on Kafka begins most encouragingly. For its first few chapters I thought that here at last was a sensible treatment of Kafka, a biographical interpretation based on the soundest of evidence: obvious correspondences between private life and public performance. These opening chapters establish the dominance of the father-image in much of Kafka's writing, by intelligent use of biographical data and analysis of the novels and tales in the light of the "Letter to My Father" which Max Brod cites in his life of Kafka. This approach was at least a change from the theological ax-grinding that has characterized a good deal of Kafka criticism, revealing so much about the mental states of some of his readers and so little about the writer: a tendency against which a reaction seems to be setting in, if one may judge from Neider's book, Austin Warren's essay on Kafka in *Rage for Order,* and a recent essay by Eliseo Vivas in the *Kenyon Review.* But, alas, the absence of salvationism in Neider's treatment apparently left a vacuum which he chose to fill with Freud: the search for God is replaced by a search for the unconscious. The last three chapters of his book, in which he expounds and defends this psychoanalytical interpretation of *The Castle* and *The Trial,* were admirably reviewed, no doubt unawares, by Vivas in a sentence of his article: "Psychoanalytic criticism is seldom practiced by properly trained therapists for their purposes; it is, as a rule, written by amateur psychoanalysts whose insensibility to the aesthetic values and indifference to the philosophic content

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of the work is hardly camouflaged by their pseudo-scientific interest in it." It seems that Neider became one of these amateurs as a result of reading Kafka. His Preface tells us that the dreamlike symbols of the novels interested him in the psychology of dreams, and that this led him to psychoanalysis, which thereupon obligingly explained Kafka. The curious thing about his book is that its first five chapters do not read like the work of a man insensible to aesthetic value and indifferent to philosophic content, whereas the last three do. One gets the impression that he hasn't digested all that Freud yet; swallow it he did, however. He claims to have discovered a "secret key" to Kafka which reveals *The Castle* as a "tale of the quest for the unconscious by someone who has reached the preconscious, presenting in detail the dynamics of the Oedipus complex," and *The Trial* as a symbol of the same quest, "presenting in detail the dynamics of the castration complex." Maybe so; but Neider's two chief conclusions about the general intent of Kafka's work are typical of the tendency of psychoanalytic criticism to claim exemption from the laws of evidence and the dictates of common sense. One of these conclusions is that Kafka, having read some Freud, deliberately wrote the two great novels on a Freudian pattern, this being the "secret cabala" to which he once referred in talking about his books. The trouble with this is that there is not a shred of evidence for it, external or internal, unless one were to dignify by that name Neider's exhaustive analysis of sex symbolism in his texts. Such symbols can be, and have been, found in equal abundance in many pre-Freudian works—*Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Inferno* offer good hunting—without necessitating the inference that they constitute a code created by the writer's conscious intelligence and will. Neider insists that Kafka *differs* from other writers in this deliberate design; but his arguments merely establish that the results of that intent, if it existed, *resemble* those of other writers' unconscious intents, if such they were. His other conclusion is equally astonishing. "What is true on the plane of social symbolism," he says, "is reversed on the subterranean level. As a result Kafka's work is shot through with paradox." Translated into English, this says that the secret meaning of Kafka's novels contradicts (this is a hard word, I know, but what else is meant by "reverse"?) their patent meaning. Well, then the novels mean nothing at all; since two contradictory meanings cancel each other out. But perhaps this objection is too naive, too Aristotelian. Perhaps the secret and patent meanings are thesis and antithesis, and the synthesis is . . . what? Neider not only fails to answer this question; he doesn't even raise it. Nor does he explain the "secret" meaning of Joseph K.'s execution—a considerable omission,

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not compensated by his excursions into what he calls nomenclatural symbolism. One of these deserves a prize of some sort. Talking about the magistrate's books in *The Trial,* he says: "The title of the second is meaningful: *How Grete was Plagued by Her Husband Hans.* Grete (from Margaret) means pearl or child of light, Hans (from Johannes) means the Lord graciously giveth or Jehovah is gracious. The noble names suggest the nobility of the libido. The intention of the book is thus not obscene." Noble names, indeed! All very Grimm.*

The Kafka literature is becoming as weird as the Lawrence literature, with about the same ratio of light to lucubration. Happy gleams of the former can be detected in an essay in Austin Warren's distinguished collection. Warren understands that criticism, like politics, is an art of the possible. One of his concluding remarks on Kafka is: "One secular hope after another has failed; Kafka *can be* the symbol of what is left." I italicize that *can be* for the benefit of critics who claim to have discovered, for all time, what a book *is* or *must be.* As with the other writers he treats—Edward Taylor, Herbert, Pope, Hopkins, Yeats, Hawthorne, Forster, James—Warren speaks of Kafka as a poet with a "rage for order," a "desire to perceive order for himself, [which] makes his final creation a kind of world or cosmos"; and he conceives his critical task to be the concentrated formulation of that cosmos and of the "language and mythic structure in which it is incarnated." Here the critic intervenes in the reader's behalf, not in what he takes to be the writer's. He aids and guides the reader's perception, suggesting a point of view from which a writer's work can be grasped as a unity, but not claiming that this unity is or even explains the work; and then retires, leaving the reader to make his own interpretations within a range of possibility limited only by a passion for precision, for *justesse,* which the critic hopes to have kindled in him by example rather than precept. This tact enables writers of Warren's degree of elegance to be almost as illuminating about a writer as the writer himself. A case in point. Nothing in Neider's book clarifies the nature of Kafka's quest half so well as does a sentence he quotes from Kafka: "All these so-called diseases, pitiful as they look, are beliefs, the attempts of a human being in distress to cast his anchor in some mother-soil." How easy to identify this metaphor as a sex-symbol, and then "explain" it as a sign of the search for the unconscious! And how much simpler, and closer to the unique values of art, to say with Warren, "Kafka's 'mystery' is the apparent

* There is a secret key to this sentence. It will be sent in a plain envelope, on request.

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sign of how elusive is the truth." Is it not just this elusiveness that lends desperation to what Kafka called the attempt to cast anchor? Elusiveness and anchor-casting are, of course, mere metaphors, artistic terms, while unconscious and preconscious are, at least in intention, scientific terms; and "truth," in this large sense, is doubtless neither here nor there. But in this case as in many others it is art, not science or philosophy, that "explains" art. By talking casually of putting down roots, or by jesting at truth, like Pilate, we can signify many kinds and levels of experience all at once. So can art, and this is one of the reasons for its irreducibility.

Of the many penetrating studies of poetic worlds in *Rage for Order,* the most successful as a portrait of man and artist is that of George Herbert. This is partly because his is the most attractive personality among those discussed; at any rate, the precise affection of Warren's treatment makes him seem so. Also, his portrait is the more smoothly and easily traceable in that the conflict between his actual and imagined worlds caused less strain and distortion in his essential humanity than was the case with most of the other figures. Certainly the religion which he ended by preaching was less of an artifact than that of Yeats, which Warren analyzes with equal delicacy and care. But each of these essays delineates with remarkable clarity and vividness temperaments, philosophies and talents which are widely dissimilar and yet comparable in the quality which Warren terms "metaphysical." This is as close as he comes to devising a label; and, wisely, he goes easy on the glue. It is less applicable to some of his poets than others: he admits himself that it does not sit too well on Pope. But it is far from being one of those superficially unifying strands so often woven into collections of articles written on different occasions. By presenting it in terms of particulars rather than instances, Warren succeeds in making it signify an essential feature of creative activity.

The contrast between Neider's secret-key chapters and Austin Warren's essays is like that between the two women, Rachel Bespaloff and Virginia Woolf. They are both benign, both seeking to widen and deepen the common reader's literary life by describing and interpreting books which they consider relevant to his everyday experience. But Mme Bespaloff tends to overinterpret and to preach; whereas Mrs. Woolf subordinates her own ideas and attitudes to those of her subjects, but in so doing suggests very subtly a definite scheme of values, without implying that her readers share or ought to share that scheme.

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Mme Bespaloff's essay, a series of brief meditations on leading figures and aspects of the *Iliad,* endeavors to re-state the Homeric view of life in modern terms. Hector is seen as a symbol of self-respect; Achilles, self-love; Helen, the ambivalence of beauty; and comparisons are made between the *Weltanschauungen* of Homer and Tolstoy, Homer and the Hebrew prophets, Homer and Christian ethics, etc. There are some penetrating observations about Homer, but none of them are remarkably original; what is new in Mme Bespaloff's treatment is a tendency to compare and even equate ideas which apparently exist in the same context for her, whether or not they are logically or historically comparable. This leads to fuzziness, and sometimes to guff. Some of her associative suggestions are well formulated: "In the Bible, God is master of Becoming; in the *Iliad,* Becoming, or *Fatum,* if you wish, is master of the Gods." "For what the Greek, in all piety, asks of his gods is not love but good will." But she frequently goes off the deep end, e.g., in stating that glory, for the Homeric warrior, is "the same thing that Christians saw in the Redemption, a promise of immortality outside and beyond history, in the supreme detachment of poetry." This is worse than vague; it's bunk. Glory was no more outside or beyond history for a Greek warrior than his dinner, and it had nothing whatever to do with Redemption. Mme Bespaloff indulges excessively in this pseudo-thinking, a process of cloaking several subjects of discourse in a thick mist which may lead the unwary or uninformed to mistake blurred outlines for new insights. Her essay is far inferior to Simone Weil's *The Iliad: Poem of Force,* which can be had for a tenth of the money, and is also excellently translated by Mary McCarthy. Mme Bespaloff's fantasies, however, are preceded by a long "introduction" by Hermann Broch, author of *The Sleepwalkers*; this increases the book's value as well as its size and price. Entitled "The Style of the Mythical Age," it has little to do with Homer or Mme Bespaloff, but says some interesting things about myth, Kafka, and the modern temper.

Since Virginia Woolf's *The Moment* was greeted in this country by an outburst of pedestrianism, published as a lead review in the most influential of the Sunday literary supplements, there is probably little anyone can do now to rescue it from oblivion. But it should not be overlooked by such innocent souls as still risk ostracism by reading books for mere enjoyment, because it contains many things on the level of *The Common Reader,* with which it was linked in Mrs. Trilling's condemnation of Mrs. Woolf for being aristocratic and refined. Like *The Death of the Moth,* its predecessor, *The Moment* is made up of essays, sketches, and reviews previously uncollected, some not previously pub-

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lished, mostly on literary topics. There are several exquisite portraits in miniature, notably those of Ellen Terry and Roger Fry; some more of Mrs. Woolf's magical evocations of the literary and artistic past, such as "Sterne's Ghost" and "B. R. Haydon"; and some of her most important critical pronouncements, including "The Leaning Tower," "The Artist in Politics," "Congreve's Comedies," and "The Art of Fiction." As usual, the value of her *aperçu* is enhanced by her constant interest in craftsmanship, language, and style, and by her inexhaustible curiosity and affection for human traits both normal and eccentric. Of all the four writers under review—perhaps, indeed, of all writers on literature—Virginia Woolf is the least "critical" in the day-of-judgment meaning of the word. She writes plastically, molding little busts and cameos of people, times and places; her every word is a revelation of her individual sensibility, and one might suspect that she has no regard for general principles at all, so little does she parade them and so modestly does she qualify the range and validity of her wider judgments. When speaking of Russian or American literature, for instance, she is careful to stress the fact that she is a foreigner, an Englishwoman, a lover of gardens, quiet, and Jane Austen. But this does not prevent her from seeing that Miss Austen may be likened to the Greek tragedians, "though with a thousand differences of degree: she, too, in her modest, everyday prose, chose the dangerous art where one slip means death." She is one of the few imaginative writers who can apply their own artistic methods to criticism without ever violating its first canon: to bring the reader closer to the book, the particular, than he could have come unaided—to "make it new," as Pound tried to do, and so often ended by making it Pound. She can instill a deeper awareness of the nature of writing by analyzing a page of Flaubert, as she does in "Re-reading Novels" in this new volume, than you could get from an entire treatise, even a good one, on truth and value in art, or contemporary significance in fiction. No writer about books surpasses her in immediacy, in the ability to convey "knowledge of" as distinguished from "knowledge about."

But this is old stuff for Virginia Woolf's admirers, and just stuff for her detractors. If one is "searching for criteria without wishing to go to the trouble of acquiring taste," as Gide accused certain people of doing, then certainly the familiar literary essay, as practiced by Hazlitt, Strachey, Woolf, is the last place to look. Such writers assume that their readers are already equipped with aesthetic palates; and, in cases where this assumption is correct, they will guide you, not just benignly but beneficently, toward what Virginia Woolf calls "that absence of self-consciousness, that ease and fellowship and sense of com-

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mon values which make for intimacy, and sanity, and the quick give and take of familiar intercourse."

Frank Jones

FASCINATION AND PHILOSOPHY

DREADFUL FREEDOM: A Critique of Existentialism. By Marjorie Grene. The University of Chicago Press. $2.75.

For Marjorie Grene, Existentialism is, above all, the expression of a spiritual predicament in which our generation finds itself. The dominant experience of this generation has been, according to the author, the utter collapse of all belief in transcendent, absolute values. As a result, man now finds himself alone; neither the God of supernatural revelation nor the gods of science and social action are there to guide and comfort him. Thus, he has become free, but free in a dread-provoking sense; he must chart his course without a compass in the void of a starless night.

The importance of Existentialism, as seen by Mrs. Grene, is that it faces this conclusion without evasion and flinching. Existentialism alone, among present-day philosophies, confronts man with a true picture of his desperate spiritual condition—or rather, this is done by one branch of Existentialism only, the "atheistic" Existentialism of Heidegger and Sartre. All other philosophies now in vogue, including pragmatism, logical positivism, and nonatheistic Existentialism, seek to gain acceptance by offering cheap and gratuitous comfort rather than by facing the facts honestly.

This does not mean, however, that the author unreservedly endorses atheistic Existentialism. On the contrary, she seems convinced that such a complete denial of absolute values cannot be the last word of philosophy. But she somehow finds herself unable to find a logically vulnerable point in the Existentialist position. She feels about Existentialism as most people do about Hume: "He can't be right, but damned if I see where he's wrong." Hence such curiously half-retracted judgments as that the analyses of Heidegger and Sartre are, "if not valid, at least terribly relevant to the dilemma of those who can find comfort in no creed of God or science" (p. 47), or that it is its emphasis upon dread and despair that "gives the movement such significance, however transient, as it obviously does have" (p. 138). In other words, Existentialism is significant in a transient way; it will remain triumphant until such time as

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our age solves its spiritual dilemma. As things stand now, whether right or wrong, it is unanswerable.

This temporary capitulation—pending the arrival of relief troops from somewhere—is pathetic in its sincerity. But it seems to me that the capitulation is unwarranted. Mrs. Grene definitely overestimates the logical stringency of Sartre's position.

In reality, it is not difficult to see through the fake character of Sartre's challenge. What Sartre says is that man is not free unless he is free to begin completely anew at every moment. If he recognizes any earlier decision as binding for him now, or if he adopts principles that put mortgages upon his future acts, he betrays his freedom. It follows that a value can be, for a free man, only what he pronounces to be a value at this moment by a groundless and unjustifiable fiat, and also that values thus created on the spur of the moment fizzle out as soon as they are born. It is easy to show, of course, that "freedom" of such a spasmodic nature is a terribly frustrating affair. Before bemoaning our having to shoulder the burden of this freedom, however, we had better go into the question whether the decision to be free really commits us to making our life such a dreary string of senseless improvisations. I don't think it does. Quite on the contrary: I am certain that a Sartrean being cannot be free, since he cannot determine himself.

It should be pointed out, at this juncture, that this theory of freedom and value is not characteristic of Existentialism, or even of atheistic Existentialism, as a whole. Heidegger's approach to the problem of meaning and value, for instance, is an entirely different one. Heidegger is concerned with the mode of being of things that "matter," things that "make a difference"; and he finds that there are such things because man's time is finite, i.e., because he dies. All meaning and urgency in life flows from the finite character of life: it is the anticipated end of life that gives it meaning. For Sartre, it is the other way around; meaning and value are created by leaving a past behind, by departing towards an open future.

Mrs. Grene does not seem to be aware of the radical nature of this difference. In paraphrasing Heidegger's doctrine, she uses expressions like "death in its utter negation of meaning," and "distracting and deceiving cares" (p. 53). But this means reading Sartre into Heidegger. For Heidegger, death is no "negation" but the only possible source of meaning, and the category of "care" (*Sorge*) belongs to the sphere of genuine rather than of distracted and adulterated existence.

Mrs. Grene's approach concedes only one function to Existentialism —that of voicing nihilism as the only adequate expression of man's

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present situation. If this is accepted, no brand of Existentialism will make sense except that of Sartre, and those applying the Existentialist method for a different purpose and in a different sense can achieve nothing but futility. Accordingly, in Mrs. Grene's exposé, Kierkegaard is merely a provincial coffeehouse eccentric, and Jaspers as well as Gabriel Marcel are philosophical pygmies, completely dwarfed by the colossal stature of Sartre. This judgment, I repeat, is inevitable if we accept Marjorie Grene's definition of what Existentialism is; but everything will appear in a different light if we reject the definition.

The main question, then, is this: Is Existentialism primarily a response to man's loss of faith in God, Reason, Progress, and Science, and an acceptance of this loss of faith as final? Or should it be understood as an attempt to give a new answer to traditional questions of philosophy, especially to questions concerning the nature of Being and Truth? To be sure, the movement will appear far less sensational if we adopt this second definition; but I think its philosophical content cannot be discovered in any other way.

Dreadful Freedom is an able and penetrating statement of a sensitive philosophical reader's fascination with Sartre, but it is no "critique" of Existentialism as such. If anyone wants to supply an adequate critique of Existentialism, the first requirement is to get over that fascination.

Paul Kecskemeti

OF MANDARIN EXCELLENCE

TWO QUIET LIVES. By David Cecil. Bobbs-Merrill. $3.00.

As one reads the best of David Cecil's writings, it is not irrelevant to think of Cyril Connolly's thoroughly witty and alert pronouncements on the style of the "new Mandarins." Mr. Connolly, with rather more than a drop of Mandarin blood in his own veins, is one to be trusted in making discriminations of Mandarin excellence: time is on his side in his notation of the enduring merits of Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians.* In that small company more than a few of Virginia Woolf's *Common Reader* essays hold their place, and so does Geoffrey Scott's *The Portrait of Zelide,* and to them may be added David Cecil's life of Cowper, *The Stricken Deer,* (first published in 1929), and today, his portrait of Thomas Gray in *Two Quiet Lives.*

If in this country the best examples of David Cecil's art have been slow in gaining critical recognition, it is because of his critical modesty

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and his deeply rooted, almost radical, conservatism; in general literary-criticism, he avoids both spectacular and fashionable choices of subjects "to write about," and the very title of his latest book, *Two Quiet Lives,* is an index to his own temperament, which is of low, yet penetrating, vitality. Beyond the discriminations of literary criticism and in his life of Cowper and his portrait of Gray, his attention is drawn to what is called "the crack-up" or "the nervous breakdown," and Cecil is happiest when he surrounds his figures with scenes of pastoral serenity, Cowper in Huntingdon, Gray at Eton, and in chambers at Pembroke in Cambridge. In such scenes all the externals of living are so "quiet," so orderly that one can almost hear dust fall on writing desks and table tops, and it is there that David Cecil observes the advances and retreats of "melancholy" and hypochondria.

David Cecil's choice of Thomas Gray, if not immensely fashionable, has its elements of timeliness: is "Gray's Elegy" Gray archetypical of poets who even today have invaded colleges and universities? And is the prospect a "melancholy" one? Perhaps not, but Gray's situation, his middle-class origins (he was son of a mother who ran a warehouse in a trading center of east London), his "refinement" beyond the aristocratic ease and brilliance of his friend, Horace Walpole, his flights of pedantry, his fine *Observations on English Metre,* place him not too far away from the "poet-teacher or teacher-poet" of the twentieth century. In recreating him David Cecil's insights are unerring: Gray's quarrel with Walpole is at last set to rights by showing Walpole's worldly generosity to Gray, his invaluable help to Gray even to the publication and fame of the "Elegy," and David Cecil's view of Gray at the pianoforte, playing Scarlatti and Vivaldi, supplies more than a hint of the Gray who "composed" his "Elegy" with a music so memorable that its many platitudes (which Voltaire observed with a Frenchman's amazement) became catch phrases in the English language. Almost every line of David Cecil's portrait is pertinent to an understanding, and certainly, to a rereading of Gray's verse and letters. It illuminates whatever seems too hastily written in Dr. Johnson's remarks on Gray's "visible fastidiousness," his "effeminacy" which "was affected most 'before those whom he did not wish to please.' " And one may also take the portrait of Gray as an oblique warning to those who look too cheerfully, too blandly at the melancholia which, at times, unfolds its wings near or over poets in American universities.

The "quiet" life of Dorothy Osborne, which precedes the portrait of Gray in David Cecil's book is slightly dim and overlaid with the flaws of the Mandarin style when it is not at its best. The décor of Dorothy

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Osborne's century—the seventeenth—is artfully reconstructed, unswept, and tastefully furnished; "Chickfields," the countryhouse, from which Dorothy Osborne wrote her letters to her lover and future husband, William Temple, floats before the reader's eye. But a little less than half of the indolent, melancholy lady herself is missing; her charms seem to have been taken, and in too much of "one piece" from Sir Edward Parry's commentaries in his edition of her letters in the Everyman's Library—and David Cecil adds nothing to them. Her husband, Sir William Temple, became Swift's patron, and Swift saw her as "Mild Dorothea, peaceful, wise and great"; what eludes David Cecil is the woman whose intellect calmed as well as charmed an impulsive, sulky, handsome, ambitious young man—a future diplomat. It is the quality of her future wisdom, her indolently poised decorum that escapes her present biographer; and Dorothy Osborne, artist as she was in writing letters that seemed to speak, not loudly, but persuasively, in a clear voice, would not have become Lady Temple, nor captured and held Sir William, without her brains.

Horace Gregory

POETRY CHRONICLE*

Stages of crisis-disintegration appear in these volumes, ranging from the naive epigone of disorder to the sharply-aware critic-poet, desperately reacting against an unrhetorical and loose naturalism and a disregard for formal values.

At the foot of error springs the Fallacy of Communication, the poetic vehicle used for non-poetic purposes, as in Hubbell's Civic Muse, McGrath's Political Muse, and Miss Rukeyser's Muse of Demonic Incoherence. Hailed for his "carved chastity of line," Hubbell is really a

* *Long Island Triptych.* By Lindley Williams Hubbell. Swallow Press and William Morrow. $2.00; *To Walk a Crooked Mile.* By Thomas McGrath. Swallow Press and William Morrow. $2.00; *The Green Wave.* By Muriel Rukeyser. Doubleday. $2.50; *Poems, 1940-1947.* By Theodore Spencer. Harvard. $2.75; *Ships and Other Figures.* By William Meredith. Princeton. $2.00; *Aegean Islands.* By Bernard Spencer. Doubleday. $2.50; *A Way of Happening.* By Ruth Herschberger. Pellegrini & Cudahy. $2.00; *Burr Oaks.* By Richard Eberhart. Oxford. $3.00; *Poems, 1922-1947.* By Allen Tate. Scribner's. $2.50.

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comedian: "The Glory of God shines over Greenpoint. / The oxen of the sun / Tread out the darkness. . . . / The delicatessens open. It is day," " . . . the land / Where, in the fullness of time, Mae West was born," and "The heart, / Said Rena, / Must learn to compose, like Palestrina"—Gershwin would have done. Literary anachronisms curiously resemble biological atavisms (supporting Brunetière's genetic theory); compare such specimens as Henry Miller, and Thomas McGrath still carrying his little banner touchingly at the end of the May Day parade. He can be fierce, as an *echt* Union Square poet: "When they saw the moon would never fill / Its inside straight they knew the game was up. / The trumpets turned up a jack of Mills bombs. / Obviously it was time for departures"; he can be tender, despite an ode for Mike Gold: "The hills sharp as a girl's breasts"; and he can write such boyishly pornographic claptrap as: "Maine is a map of Freud with feminine fine lakes / And phallic forests wherever the blind eye looks."

A Heraclitean nightmare of texture without structure, Miss Rukeyser's flux may be a result of the Fallacy of Expressive Form, the form yielding to the raw material of the poem; hers is, with MacLeish, a tragedy of the thirties, the wrack of a genuine sensibility in a zealous topicality (e.g., the immortal "Not Sappho, Sacco"). She is left with the ultimate topic; and, inevitably, the book, which concerns itself with sex and reproduction ("Strangler and bitch, they said, / but they mistook the meaning of my name: / I am the root who embraces the source. / I sing. I sing," she sings), reaches its climax in "Nine Poems," a sonnet-cycle of pregnancy, month-by-month.

Chaos has many faces: it leers through a Shakespearean sonnet of Miss Millay, and it smiles in the unimpeachable pseudo-order of Theodore Spencer; here, in the almost textureless, careful cadences of Housman-out-of-Emerson-out-of-Donne, is the emptiness of the academic vacuum. "We look around and the Usual / Is all that we can find," he writes in "Song." Simple, with an ingénue's simplicity, wise to the time-styles and the author's limitations, it is poetry-for-verse's-sake, a willed verse, and rarely comes alive; it pays lip service to the idea of paradox, but ignores its essence, the worked-out dramatic impact; it is pleasant, skillful, innocuous, and dull.

Struggling towards order are the war-poets (preposterous term): the American, William Meredith, and the Englishman, Bernard Spencer. The first suffers from youth and a fine excess—that is, in his passionate poems; in his witty poems, he is sometimes a clumsy Karl Shapiro, if such a thing is possible; see (in "Battlewagon") "Old Billy-be-damned bang bang flashy-in-battle," "Oh by jesus noise," "exquisite with pur-

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pose," and (in "A Figure from Politics"), "The gigantic sweet conspiracy of lovers." But for all his absurdity, and surely his Notes are among the most incredible in modern poetry (he explains, for example, that the *ubi sunt* theme was a medieval favorite, dutifully quoting Wells's *Manual* to prove it), one feels an unusual sense of control, an awareness of form, and a possibility that when he leaves the schoolroom and kicks out his teachers, Yeats, Auden, & Co., he may achieve a real evocation of experience. Bernard Spencer, older, British-in-a-Greek-setting, has a keen eye, a warming freshness, a sincerity that make him stand out in this *galère* (consider, for instance, a passage from "Olive Trees": "The dour thing in olive trees / is that their trunks are stooped like never dying crones, / and they camp where roads climb, and drink with dust and stones. / The pleasant thing is how in the heat / their plumage brushes the sight with a bird's-wing feeling: / and perhaps the gold of their oil is mild with dreams of healing"); in an ordered age, neatly tightening the diffuseness of the lines, the loose Eliot flavor ("the old man dying upstairs," etc.), he might have become a first-rate minor poet.

"Poetry makes nothing happen," says Miss Herschberger, quoting Auden; but it is not true that nothing makes poetry happen. Fortunately, this nothingness centers in just a few of her cuter poems, such as "Love Like a Capitol Hill," ending in Dorothy Parker rather than Ransom; and, on the whole, hers is one of the most remarkable first volumes in many years. *A Way of Happening* is John Crowe Ransom rewritten for the woman's page, with such excellent success that he may have to revise his comments on women-poets in *The World's Body;* her "Miss G," for example, is his own poem on the death of a lady skillfully reworked. It is obvious that Miss Herschberger has a pretty wit, and that because of her intelligence, she has taken the short cut to lightness and irony sooner than most young poets. There are lines which delight ("Turtles were subtle at the ship's low keel"), such phrases as "the fool funicular," parts of "Little Cuckold," set in expert verse patterns; but there are also lapses in taste, such as "The Moor," incongruities ("the emmet's laughter"), overcuteness, sentimentality, diffuseness. Actually, there are two Miss Herschbergers warring against each other, the witty and objective ironist and the subjective and feeling woman, who, happily manage, for the most part, to keep the peace.

Whatever defects appear in Eberhart's work, the things one cannot doubt are his talent, his sincerity, and his genuineness; what is noticeable, however, is his ineffectuality, a basic weakness, an apparently willful will-lessness. He has his fine and quiet triumphs, as in the lyric "Cover Me Over, Clover"; yet one detects, perhaps mistakenly, a failure of

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nerve, an absence of that intellectual toughness which enabled Yeats to write cleverly and long and well; Eberhart's loose lyrical substance is too powerless to create the necessary structure-texture tension. Both Eberhart and Miss Herschberger, outstanding poets in their ways, reveal the dangerous breadth of the chasm in modern sensibility.

Tate's *Collected Poems, 1922-1947* requires much more space than is left for an adequate discussion of an importance, both critical and poetic, which has never been fully gauged. The fact that Tate is a leader of a corps of critic-poets who have risen out of an intensely felt need, in a time of disorder, to defend our perilously-placed culture helps to explain his poetry, its tone, and the form it takes. Early in his career Tate decided that "Poetry does not dispense with tradition; it probes the deficiencies of a tradition," and he is, ironically, a propagandist in verse, much of his work being a variation on a theme in "Dover Beach." His poetry, though, like Theodore Spencer's, conative in origin, transcends both the latter's and Blackmur's by the superior quality of his creative sensibility, having often a fine texture to go with his structure; so successful has he been that some passages (e.g., the opening of "The Mediterranean") have become touchstones for our time. Since it is a willed poetry, it is difficult to sustain, his achievements being mainly fragmentary, twisting off into overwrought lines and lumpy self-conscious passages. Nevertheless, Tate is, like Jonson, a poet's poet and a critic's poet, functioning as guide and assimilator of sensibility; there is a rightness about his best work, reminding us that he is not only one of the finest poets of our age, but that he probably corresponds to what Delmore Schwartz has called T. S. Eliot, a culture-hero. The publication now of his collected poems comes as a testimony to integrity and order in our time of brilliant and weak failure.

William Elton

THE GUILTY AND THE LIVING

THE QUESTION OF GERMAN GUILT. By Karl Jaspers. Translated by E. B. Ashton. Dial. $2.00.

Heine long ago observed that the Germans were pre-eminent in philosophy because they had nothing else to do. The nonexistence of a political society in Germany compelled its best intellects to seek other fields, leaving public affairs in the hands of bureaucratic admin-

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istrators. Enforced indifference to politics produced the characteristically German phenomenon of *Weltfremdheit* among its men of thought. This is no mere scholarly unworldliness or touching practical vagueness. In fact, the alacrity with which the German intellectual world submitted to Hitler is proof that, if it knew nothing of politics, it at least knew how to be politic. *Weltfremdheit* is an inner acceptance of the intellect's exclusion from the public forum.

Today, without a national and political tradition to fall back on, it is precisely intellectuals on whom Germany must rely. Yet *Weltfremdheit* and the moral cowardice which it begot disqualify most intellectuals now in Germany. At this juncture Karl Jaspers, a professor and a philosopher, has courageously undertaken the thankless duty of speaking out to his fellow Germans on the question of their guilt.

Professor Jaspers makes no attempt in these lectures to "describe" the crimes of Nazism, to evoke the evil in its fullness—intentionally so, I have been told, lest the audience to which his words are directed be tempted perversely to extract a grim kind of flattery from the very enormity of the evil. His concern is to distinguish the various senses in which Germans are guilty of the Nazi acts, in order that each shall by self-examination come to understand his own responsibility.

By distinguishing among several categories of guilt—criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical—Professor Jaspers breaks down the notion of collective guilt. This is all to the good—where all are guilty, none is. Thus, the "question" of German guilt, in the realm of post-war international politics, has been settled—guilty or not, the German collectivity is being punished as if it were—and its only consequence has been to make the Germans even more sullen and indifferent to what the world charges them with.

Nevertheless, faced with the frightful mess that is Germany today, it is just this question of national guilt that is most apt to rouse us out of our own apathy. How was it possible, we still wonder, for a handful of debased and vulgar amateur politicians so intimately to involve a whole nation in their victory and ultimate ruin that we are tempted to look on mere membership in this nation as a kind of guilt? Professor Jaspers' distinctions provide the only sane basis on which to consider this question without resorting to superficial collective characterizations. He himself hardly does so, though what he says is interesting: "We do not drop the distinction [between political liability and moral guilt], but we have to narrow it by saying that the conduct which made us liable rests on a sum of political conditions whose nature is moral, as it were, because they help to determine individual morality. . . . There

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is a sort of collective moral guilt in a people's way of life which I share as an individual and from which grow political realities. . . . There is no absolute division of politics and human existence as long as man is still realizing an existence . . ." Professor Jaspers was perhaps wise in not pursuing this further; it would have meant a disquisition on German history, and his audience has been only too prone in the past to take refuge from the failure of its own history in the *idea* of history.

In the *Urfaust,* Mephistopheles says to Faust: *"Ist's doch das einzige Kunststück euch in euern Verworrenheiten Lufft zu machen, dass ihr den entgegnenden Unschuldigen zerschmettert."* Professor Jaspers' book is a strong corrective to this tendency to blame one's own difficulties on someone else. Yet there is a kind of sad pointlessness to the *Schuldfrage* now. There is no longer anything at stake in the answer to the question. Repentance or unrepentance, guilt or innocence—what do these things matter in Europe today?

Martin Greenberg

ACADEMICIAN'S CHAPBOOK

ART AND THE SOCIAL ORDER. By D. W. Gotshalk. University of Chicago Press. $3.75.

Anyone interested in the American academic mind—and the recent wild growth of academicism forces us to that interest—can find in this ponderous volume its full-scale portrait. It is not a pretty sight.

Nothing delights the American academician more than a newly contrived synthesis. To juggle materials, reclassify them, and then develop a "theory" (or, as R. W. Flint has noticed, a "clue") which is merely a shift in verbal emphasis is standard procedure for academic studies. This tendency has been inflated to grandiose absurdity in F.S.C. Northrop's *The Meeting of East and West* which synthesized all human thought into nothingness.

Stalking his synthesis, Professor Gotshalk rejects "nihilistic" theories of art. ("Nihilistic" means a definite, limited, and hence *non*-synthesized point of view.) Plato's theory of art as "imitation" is taken to mean "that the purpose of fine art is the copying of nature." Hence Gotshalk can triumphantly inquire: "If fine art is imitation, why art? The original must always be so much superior." And so much for Plato. Freud is similarly disposed of: that which the old master always and almost

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pathetically insisted on—that his genetic investigations of creative processes were not intended as value judgments of art—is blandly ignored. And so much for Freud.

Instead our professor launches a nasty and obtuse attack on modern art as a "withered skeleton" of cynicism and irresponsibility in order to plump for his synthesis: an "organic" view of art as based on a "beneficient unity of belief" within a "general welfare state." Such phrases are already enough to give one a bad chill, but when Gotshalk hails the "great burst of fresh artistic activity of considerable promise" in Stalinist Russia and declares that there "the arts have had a position not unlike that in the best 'organic' societies," then we know the discussion is at an end.

As usual the style keeps pace with the ideas. Here is an example of what passes for English prose in the academy:

> This subordination of overt action to the amplification of intrinsic perception is a fundamental feature of the negative side of the aesthetic experience, and its explicit recognition is required, along with putting at a distance nonaesthetic interests, in any adequate description even of this side of the picture.

It is depressing to realize that the university presses will churn

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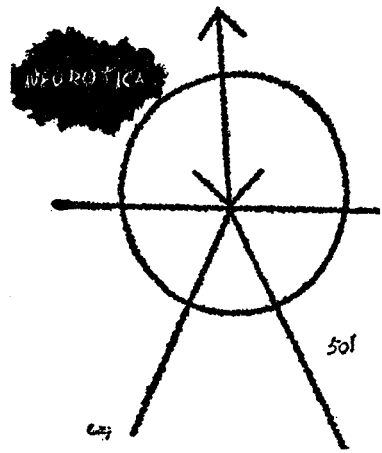

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such books out year after year, one forming a footnote in the next, and that graduate students will cleave their way through these prose jungles to find a reference for a thesis that no one will read.

J. B.

FRENCH PERIODICALS

Simone de Beauvoir publishes the first installment of her diary on her last year's trip to America in the December, 1947 issue of *Les Temps Modernes.*

Madame de Beauvoir still likes Steinbeck, James Cain, and Erskine Caldwell. She is not well-disposed toward PARTISAN REVIEW: it is not open to the realistic currents of American life, and it is snobbish.

What strikes her in America is "the divorce between intellectuals and creative writers; most creative writers started out by selling newspapers or shining shoes and acquired their culture through the hazards of life; inversely, it is very rare that men of culture produce creative writing; so that this quarrel is almost a class quarrel. In France we have an overproduction of intellectuals; for us the effort of writers to integrate the crudest forms of life into literature was new and has enriched us particularly."

Some of Madame de Beauvoir's observations on the role of psychology and especially of psychoanalysis in America seem relevant: If psychoanalysis is so fashionable in the U.S., it is not because Americans expect this discipline to help them to "find themselves," but on the contrary because they expect from it complicity with their own escapism. The unadjusted may be tempted to question the order of the world in which he lives; such a revolutionary attitude is dangerous and threatening for society, and in turn creates anxieties in the individual who has to face decisions, risks, responsibilities. Hence, the individual admits a priori that he who is maladjusted is wrong, and he is only too happy to consider his confusion a sickness which can be cured as easily as a cold. All the questions which worry him, all his doubts and anxieties are not recognized as expressions of an inner truth; they are considered to be objective realities which must be studied scientifically . . . Every individual is a "case." An individual who departs from the norm because of his extravagance, eccentricity, the affirmation of his individuality, is called "a character." A "case" is described by his "problem." Every American citizen has a "problem" just as he has a marital status; if he is normal and perspicacious, he himself knows how to define it in terms

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which already indicate its solution; if he is less perspicacious, he defines the problem and demands its solution from competent people. . . . Psychoanalysis is a huge enterprise of social recuperation; its sole aim is to allow each citizen to take again his place in society. Adjusting actually means giving up one's personality; being happy means knowing how to remain energetically blindfolded. Many things would change among Americans if they could bring themselves to admit that there is unhappiness in the world and that unhappiness is not a priori a crime.

However, the Sartre school of Existentialism, of which Madame de Beauvoir is an eminent and fighting spokesman, recently has been threatened in its own camp. Georges Bataille, the critic and essayist—sometimes called an Existentialist himself—devotes two articles in his magazine *Critique* (December and February) to an attack against Sartre and his disciples. He accuses them of having given up the key Existentialist position according to which "existence precedes essence," and of having constructed an elaborate metaphysical system—whereas Kierkegaard reasoned only from the inner and pressing needs of his "being in the world," his subjectivity. The true Existentialist should live before knowing, should test and experience existence, but Sartre and his school manifest a "hypertrophy of intellectual functions." For them, knowledge becomes a professorial exercise which takes precedence over all other activities. It is no longer, as for Kierkegaard, the subjective life of the individual which poses questions, but the exigencies of synthetic thinking. . . . One has the impression that moral impotence has been caused by an excess of intellectual power. "Like a child driven by an urgent need, hopping around uneasily without being able to make up his mind, this kind of thinking remains evasive yet keeps alive—it is sick of a morose virtuosity. . . . "

Sartre's own attacks against all previous systems of philosophy are now turned against him. He who most of all denounced the "thingification" of men is being accused now of this very crime: "Existential philosophy makes us into things in a more profound sense even than science which at least left the private and intimate being untouched."

If Existentialism continues to elicit passionate discussion in all French literary periodicals, Marxism also remains a perennial debate subject. In the February issue of *Masses,* Michel Collinet, formerly a leading member of the socialist left and prominent in the Resistance, publishes some remarkable pages on the anniversary of the Communist Manifesto. It is in the interpretation and especially the prediction of Nazism that Marxism has revealed its Achilles' heel. Having elucidated the progressive

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yet antagonistic factors which govern capitalist society, Marxism neglected certain regressive factors such as the persistence of ideologies which stand in the way of adaptation to economic realities. This might have seemed of secondary importance in periods of ascendancy like the nineteenth century. But in a period of economic decomposition and political catastrophe the regressive factors become dominant; myth, traditions, old ideologies which in earlier periods had been pushed into the background by purposeful activity, now become decisive. In the face of this social sickness, classical Marxism is as defenseless as was the pre-Freudian physician in the face of a patient's compulsion neurosis.

Man exists only as a particle, as a private being, in the plebeian mass. The social being is destroyed in each individual. This is why such a mass calls for a leader. The atomized individual who is denied direct contact with society can only exist through a Führer who monopolizes the individual's social essence and his political consciousness. The mass of *déclassés* recognizes itself in the Führer, identifying itself with him.

The totalitarian party, the militarized plebs, differs from any kind of democratic party just as a disciplined army differs from civil society. In the Nazi party, the alienation of man was complete. The individual core disappeared, what remained was only an object, an unconscious

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instrument of leadership. What is at first achieved within the party becomes the essence and anticipation of what the party tries to accomplish within society at large. The traditional relations between state and society are finally reversed. The totalitarian party is the instrument by which the state absorbs society. If one wrote a new Communist Manifesto, one would not have to talk about class struggles which indeed no longer exist but to evaluate the chances of success of the various Führers; strategy would replace historical determinism, the language of Machiavelli that of Marx.

Thierry Maulnier, in pre-war days one of the leading intellectual spokesmen of the extreme right, who has now moved to some sort of anti-Marxist socialist position, contributes a remarkable article on "Marxism and Its Morality" to the March issue of *Nef*.

Marxism always has scared the bourgeoisie, scared it not only as a political movement but also as a *Weltanschauung*. The bourgeois ideologists were never able to come to grips with, let alone refute, the basic tenets of Marxist thought. All accusations against its materialism, its mechanism, have remained superficial. Bourgeois thought has created admirable works in spheres far removed from those investigated by

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Marxism, but it never was capable of redefining itself in terms of the problems that Marx raised. Against Marxism there prevailed frivolity, bad faith, and a suspect kind of eloquence and rhetoric.

But if the bourgeoisie has a "bad conscience," this does not imply that the proletarian revolutionaries have a "good conscience." On the contrary, while they have attacked the bourgeois worship of "eternal values" and exposed them as a mystification, they have themselves smuggled in those very values through the back door. The values by which the bourgeoisie justifies its domination are denounced as historical and relative by the critical efforts of the proletarian thinkers, but once these values pass into the hands of the proletariat they suddenly become authentic and universal. "Bourgeois truth is the truth of a class, at the service of a class, i.e., falsehood; proletarian truth is also truth of a class at the service of a class, but this class makes of it the 'true' truth, the truth of science."

The proletarian revolution is assigned the task of finally realizing philosophy, for so far philosophy only has served to justify unjust conditions through the elaboration of ideals which served untruth:

> In the first effort of the Marxist thinker, all values are reduced to their historicity; they are treated as means of attack and defense of the contending classes. Then in a second effort the proletarian values, and they alone, are erected in intangible and unconditional glory on the summits toward which humanity marches; they become the supreme end of revolutionary practice.

They are no longer pure absolutes as in bourgeois thought but rather "relative absolutes," absolutes of history: they have passed into the service of the proletariat and are now above the proletariat which is destined to realize them; they have become the supreme reference by which all tactical impostures, all momentary iniquities can be justified.

While reading Thierry Maulnier's attack, one isn't always very clear whether he is speaking of Marxism or of Stalinism, but this confusion of the critics is hardly surprising if one reflects upon the all-pervasive confusion on this subject in the French left. The well-known leftist Catholic review *Esprit* (by no means a fellow-traveling organ), recently devoted a whole issue (December 1947) to the danger of a Gaullist neo-fascism while ignoring almost completely the danger of Stalinist totalitarianism and, in fact, advocating an alliance with the Stalinists against De Gaulle. Joseph Rovan, e.g., can write in this issue:

> There is no Third Force in present-day politics. The eternal Third Force lives in libraries and convents and dies on the scaffold. Present-day politics force us to choose between fascism and revolution, between two kinds of violence, between Gaullism with or without De Gaulle on the one hand, and common

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action with the Communist Party, as it is, on the other. We are placed in a historical situation in which every step is sinful, but where abstaining from walking is a sin also. We must prefer the violence which promotes the proletarian revolution to a liberty which promotes fascism. Later on, as the problems emerge, we will ask the real questions: What kind of violence, until when and up to what point?

In the same issue, Paul Fraisse asks correctly: "Are we blind enough to forget that there exists also a fascism of the left? Shouldn't we then reject both kinds of fascism simultaneously?" But he concludes that one has to deal with first things first, that the Gaullist danger is the most pressing now.

The syndicalist monthly *Revolution Proletarienne* prints an excellent rejoinder by J. D. Martinet to this position of *Esprit*. We quote only the concluding sentences:

> The naiveté of the present position of *Esprit* is fearsome. It makes those spiritualists into standard-bearers of Stalinist fascism. And if Stalinism should triumph one can easily imagine the "loyal opposition" of the group around Emmanuel Mounier: it would again innocently serve the Stalinists . . . until the day when they—or at least their best elements—will also be liquidated.

One more example of the complete confusion on the issue of Stalinism which still prevails in most sectors of the French left: Georges Bataille recently reviewed Kravchenko's *I Chose Freedom* in *Critique* for January. Here are a few of his key remarks: When the peace came in August, 1945, a feeling of inferiority developed nearly everywhere. Only the Communist world remained an exception, a monolith among an anxious and incoherent multitude united by nothing but its fear. But this monolith which carries limitless hopes in its own destiny at the same time represents instant terror to all those who don't accept its laws. Communism destroys all hope for those opposed to it; hence, the fear of Communism has become an obsession to all who are not Communist.

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The rest of the world is incapable of initiative, it relies on the forces of inertia, it abandons itself to its own contradictions, and its ideas are nothing but impotent stammerings of protest.

M. Bataille knows very well that Communism means "resolute contempt for individual interests, for thinking, personal rights, and conveniences." But what is to be found on the other side? "The modern bourgeois personality appears as the meanest incarnation that humanity has ever assumed; but to this isolated 'personality,' to this mediocrity, Communism offers a leap into death. Of course, the 'personality' refuses to jump, but it does not, for all of that, become more appealing. . . . "

Bataille is by no means a Stalinist, yet he finds it useless to "close one's eyes so as not to see in the Soviet Union of today, with its rude and intolerant aspects, the expression not of decadence but rather, on the contrary, of a will that nothing can daunt in its determination to resolve the real problems of the revolution."

Such are the contradictions in the political thinking of the French left, that the same Emmanuel Mounier, editor-in-chief of *Esprit*, after publishing the above mentioned Stalinoid issue, in the January number of his magazine reacts violently to the recent attack by A. Zhdanov—

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the Politburo member charged with shadowing what passes for philosophical thought in the Soviet Union—on a textbook on Western philosophy by one Alexandrov. He writes:

> The revolution is in power for thirty years already, for thirty years it has been fashioning thought. . . . If Russian philosophers still cling en masse to "formalism and apolitical thought," to "admiration for what is foreign" and "take refuge in the past," it is rather difficult for Zhdanov to reduce all this resistance to "subjective factors"; one should reason according to good Marxist criteria and conclude that there must be something very wrong in the objective situation. Does one not note this paralysis which the powers-that-be impart to thinking when, immediately after asking of the philosophers more self-criticism and independent research, Zhdanov says: "Your discussion of Hegel is rather strange. . . . The question of Hegel has been resolved a long time ago. There is no reason whatsoever to pose it anew. . . ." One has to call things by their name: we are here faced with a mortal error of Russian Communism, a radical deformation of revolutionary humanism. . . .

The author ends his piece by an appeal to the Communists of the West to assume a task of education in respect to their comrades of the East. He thinks that it is precisely in the Catholic countries, which—according to the very Catholic Mounier—have always contained a fruitful melange of orthodoxy and liberty, that this new Western Stalinism has most chances to develop. It would seem rather difficult to push confusion further, and yet Mounier is considered an eminent representative of progressive thought in the France of today. . . .

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VARIETY

MUSKRAT RAMBLE: POPULAR AND UNPOPULAR MUSIC

> " . . . in the ripe olives the very circumstances of their being near to rottenness adds a peculiar beauty to the fruit."

It is midafternoon. I come away from the window and the rooftops and turn the knob on the radio that sends a thin line cutting across the rows of numbers. I would like to hear, say, Earl Hines playing "Rosetta" but will settle for a Lee Wiley record; except for a station on which a voice not easily distinguishable from Miss Margaret Truman's is singing "At Dawning" and another on which a program of "light classics" by a feeble string group emerges oppressively distinct, all the other stations are playing record after record by big dance bands. Claude Thornhill, Kay Kyser, Tex Beneke, Charlie Spivak, Vaughn Monroe. I switch off the radio and go into the other room to pour myself a drink.

We live in a time of triumphant demonstration of the three laws Mr. Nock found so illuminating: Epstean's law (people satisfy their needs and desires with the least possible exertion), Gresham's (bad money drives out good money), and the law of diminishing returns.

For the last ten years or more, a period that has been sufficiently dispiriting for both High and Popular Culture, it has still been possible, though the occasions of possibility have been rare enough, for some works of value to emerge. In High Culture, individual writers, painters, and composers, most of them isolated as so many bears in winter, have gone on working, and in climates colder than most bears care for. Although Gresham's law in particular has continued to function with the efficiency and drive of a supercharged bonecrusher, it has had to cope with one factor that alone has kept the world from becoming a cultural Nagasaki —the granitelike recalcitrance of these figures of High Culture. It is all that stands between what little we have left and a world completely at the mercy of the John Steinbecks, Eli Siegmeisters, Fibber McGees, Leon Krolls, and Henry Seidel Canbys.

High Culture, although it has been subject to the same accelerated tendencies toward decay that kept Henry Adams awake and put the world to sleep, still has a kind of life, however spasmodic its successes and however hemmed in by the all but completely victorious Middle Culture that takes what it can assimilate both from High and Popular Culture for the purpose of mashing them to death.

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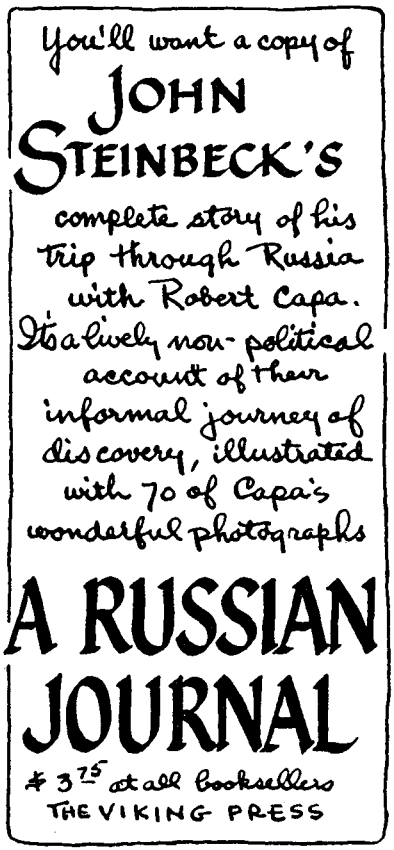
But Popular Culture is completely at the mercy of the laws hastening corruption and decay. Popular Culture must *go along*. No other road is open. Unlike High Art, it cannot fall back on attitudes of recalcitrance for survival. Lloyd Hamilton, W. C. Fields, Buster Keaton—comedians of wit, humanity, and situation, for instance, give way to verbalizing gagsters: Bob Hope, Milton Berle, Red Skelton.* The comic strip evolves into a series of continued stories that are linear replicas of soap operas and the pulps; and similar patterns tiredly repeat themselves in every field of Popular Culture.

If the laws of which I have spoken could themselves speak, however, their proudest boast would be reserved for the debasement of popular music. Here is total capitulation. The period from the end of the First World War to about 1936 was one of enormous productivity of first-rate tunes; month after month accounted for numbers that are still fresh after a decade of repetition. Even David Rose has done his worst and left them relatively untouched. The period represents a flowering that has few comparable examples in the Popular Arts. But after 1936 the drought set in. The last ten years, so far as popular music is concerned, have been bleak. From around 1920 to 1936: Exactly Like You, Thou Swell, Tea for Two, My Fate is in Your Hands, Honeysuckle Rose, April in Paris, Avalon, Get Out of Town, I Never Knew, Nice Work if You Can Get It, Baby Won't You Please Come Home, Fascinatin' Rhythm, The Man I Love, Just One of Those Things, Yesterdays, On the Sunny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* Fields, toward the end of his life (like Chaplin today) became increasingly savage in his satire, and an audience that wanted nothing but reassurance could only respond uneasily, baffled and repelled; eventually it turned away from him. Along these lines, the reception of Chaplin's last film has been very instructive.

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Side of the Street, Cherry, It Had to Be You, There'll Be Some Changes Made, You Do Something to Me, Moanin' Low, I Know That You Know, Liza, My One and Only, Embraceable You, Someone to Watch Over Me, Memories of You, Lady Be Good, I Can't Get Started With You (written by Vernon Duke and Ira Gershwin in 1936—about the last gasp of the period), My Kinda Love, Time on My Hands, Concentratin' on You, Delilah, Rose Room, Body and Soul, After You've Gone, Old Fashioned Love, Keepin' Myself for You—a much-truncated list, but one that includes most of the tunes on which both good jazz performers and everyone on down from there—including the large ponderously-stringed music-to-read-by *schmalz* combinations—have depended most heavily.

A handful of men wrote most of them: Gershwin, Spencer Williams, Fats Waller, Youmans, Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hart. Most of these men are dead; there have been no successors. (Out of an earlier jazz period that stretched into the twenties came such revered hot classics as Wolverine Blues, That's a Plenty, King Porter Stomp, Ballin' the Jack, Some of These Days, St. Louis Blues, Jazz Me Blues, Royal Garden Blues, Maple Leaf Rag, Squeeze Me, Wabash Blues, among a great many more. These belong to a time as enclosed and without continuance as that of the Ephrata Cloisters, Vorticism, or the demesne of Lord Timothy Dexter.) Today from the broken tap that Cole Porter turns on at widely-spaced intervals leak repetitive imitations of his earlier smooth flow. Vernon Duke writes songs for children and "serious" music. Duke Ellington interests himself in musical embroidery work. He has also recently become a disk jockey and plays some of the most richly-debased stuff ever committed to wax. Richard Rodgers composes music for operettas like *Oklahoma* and *Allegro,* a very sad end. Harold Arlen, responsible for such unfaded period pieces as Fun To Be Fooled, You Said It, Moanin' in the Morning, and Down with Love, has eliminated from his work his early originality and spontaneity.

The general drift of songwriters to the West Coast since the introduction of sound films has had its effects. In Hollywood, Epstean's law finds its purest expression. Songwriters, malleable as margarine, easily made happy by residences convenient to a racetrack, have lived up to the pattern. Hollywood Hit Parade - juke box - Hooperized numbers tailored to blanket the country and ravel out in four weeks, become all-pervading models. Just as large sections of industry seem to be consciously aiming at the creation of overpriced jimcrack merchandise—expensive fountain pens that feed great blots

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on one's stationery, alarm clocks that fail to go off, shirts that turn to ribbons after three washings, toothpaste that brings on gingivitis, chinaware that disintegrates in the dishwater, so does the songwriting industry aggrandize the ephemeral as it ransacks the most barren and unserviceable ideas of the past. "Imitation diamonds," wrote Tocqueville over one hundred years ago, "are now made which easily may be mistaken for real ones; as soon as the art of fabricating false diamonds shall have reached so high a degree of perfection that they cannot be distinguished from real ones, it is probable that both one and the other will be abandoned, and become mere pebbles again." Tocqueville's prediction has yet to be realized; the relevance of his metaphor persists. Songwriters of late have attempted only the imitation of imitations.

The nervous, gay, compulsive music of the twenties gives way to a tastelessness streamlined beyond belief. Gershwin and some of his contemporaries were greatly gifted men *for what they were doing,* expressing simple emotions with a freshness of melodic and harmonic ideas and with a particular sense of joy that the thirties buried (enthralled Stalinist gravediggers wielding albums of Josh White and the Red Army Chorus under their arms; "folk" operettists; novelty swing combinations; exponents of calculated corn; floy-floy hysterics; the composers of the song "everyone" is whistling —Chi Baba Chi Baba, Chickory Chick, Open the Door Richard, Pistol Packin' Mama, People Will Say We're in Love, Jingle Jangle Jingle, Deep in the Heart of Texas, There'll Be Bluebirds Over the White Cliffs of Dover, I'll Dance at Your Wedding—an endless and unspeakable catalogue. There are few more dependable methods of obtaining a quick migraine than by merely reading over a list of the hit tunes of the last ten or twelve years.

Monolithic symbol of the whole period is the juke box: this permanent guest in public places that squats like some ominous and temporarily static beast, afoam with lights and tubes of colored water; it might have been built by André Breton in collaboration with some monstrously sick and divided opponent of industrialism who had spent a claustrophobic lifetime in Greek candy stores. There it sits, booming or silently awaiting a nickel, ready with "A Rainy Night in Rio" and Perry Como, where

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the piano player used to be, his cigarette turning the ivories of the upper register a sickly Mars yellow. He was not often a good pianist, but he knew more tunes than the twenty the juke box knows; and you could talk to him.

Compared with the music currently being written, musical performance is deceptively healthy. Even the best jazz today lacks the fresh originating intelligence at work in the late twenties; and the best musicians are now only extending and developing patterns of improvisation laid out during the early quarter of this century. There is an immense concern with mere preservation. The unearthing, several years ago, of Bunk Johnson, probably the oldest living pioneer of jazz, who had dropped out of music and had to be provided with a set of new teeth before his triumphant comeback, was a welcome act of antiquarian recovery. Johnson's long-buried and pure turn-of-the-century New Orleans style served as a landmark from which to view almost fifty years of jazz mutations and variants. Johnson's more impassioned admirers correctly placed great emphasis on his astonishing power and wide-open tone, alive with personal feeling. These almost compensated for an inventive deficiency that made for considerable monotony as chorus followed chorus.

It has been the practice of some later musicians to work intensively at the inventive, though feeling has often been buried in displays of virtuosity. Performers such as Armstrong, James P. Johnson, Kid Ory, Barney Bigard, Art Tatum, Earl Hines, Bechet, Jack Teagarden, Georg Brunis, Ben Webster, and a good many of the Chicago stylists clustered around Eddie Condon, continue to resist corruption; but their ranks are systematically being thinned out by desertions for cushier swing bands, by sudden collapses of talent, and the normal high death rate among jazz musicians, whose occupational hazards include heart attacks, malnutrition, and a recurrent pattern of drunkenness and sudden death of pneumonia in Middle Western cities.

More than a few go on playing well; the difficulties of hearing them continue to multiply. Manhattan's Fifty-Second Street, once as devoted to night clubs featuring jazz and jam sessions as Grand Street is to wedding gowns or Bleecker Street to salami, makes way for replacements in the form of office buildings, expensive clubs, business establishments, and tourist night spots with "intimate" singers and Hawaiian dancing girls. Four years ago there was at least one night club in New York that offered first-rate jazz, unwatered and nonpoisonous liquor at reasonable prices, and a quiet crowd that did not come there to have their photographs taken, their

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caricatures drawn, or to annoy the musicians. This was the Pied Piper, on Barrow Street, in the Village. For a brief period, when it first opened, it offered a memorable five-piece group that included Max Kaminsky, the late Rod Cless on clarinet, Frank Orchard on valve trombone, and, as intermission pianist and at the top of his form, the remarkable, vastly influential, and still underrated James P. Johnson. There is nothing remotely like the Pied Piper left in New York. Indifferent music, high prices, poor liquor, or combinations of this trinity have taken over everywhere. The rash of jazz "concerts" in such places as Town Hall have not been very satisfactory substitutes. The musicians, along with the more ravaged-looking members of the audience, wear expressions of strain brought on by the absence of a bar and by a milieu too little enclosed. At various times, attempts have been made to present regular programs of good jazz on the air—notably those conducted by Condon and by Rudi Blesh; but from the start their chances of commercial sponsorship were as remote as those of Wallace Stevens' appearing as a regular contributor in *Collier's*. The networks made short work of both programs.

While jazz persists on records and occasionally elsewhere, the best of it increasingly nostalgic, depending more and more on a cultist rather than on a popular base, it is almost drowned out by

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the racket of the large swing and popular bands. These have next to nothing to do with jazz, although they often contain remnants of rather gratuitous jazz in solo work (the best of these bands, Artie Shaw's and Benny Goodman's, are gone). Standard practice today in the search for trade-marks and novelty is the isolation of some rhythmic pattern, tonal element, or harmonic trickery to vulgarize and thus "build up" a "style." Hence "rippling rhythms," slinky piano effects, fixated use of a series of augmented chords, musical statements that are so surfacy that they beg the question of feeling at all. The Stan Kenton band is a good example of tremendous effort going into the creation of such a style, through echo chamber effects and hollow intimations of Debussy and Stravinsky.

Enormously popular just now are the relaxed Cream of Wheat-Gerber's Baby Food instrumental trios, usually piano, guitar, and string bass, with one man singing empty little jump tunes. There are dozens of these, all playing at a volume undeviating as a cat's purr. This music had its origin, I would guess, in the dimly-lit night clubs of the East Fifties, where it served, and still serves, the purpose of covering up dead spots in the conversation. Like the music that dominated the period in the late 1700's just before the revolutionary music of Gluck, it was not originally intended to be listened to at all. Millions now follow it, over the air and on records.

And now, finally, we come to those who play in the latest and extravagantly-acclaimed manner variously labeled Be-Bob, bebop, and rebop. Here is a full-fledged cult. Its more orthodox devotees even model their appearance on that of Dizzy Gillespie, bebop's pioneer and bellwether, a goateed trumpet player who wears a beret, horn-rimmed glasses, and neckties with his own not very appealing countenance painted thereon. Iconoclastic and compulsive types, many bebop cultists extend their interests beyond music—to drug-addiction, abstract painting, and the theories (and for all I know the practice) of Wilhelm Reich, philosopher of the orgasm. Some beboppers are interested in the close textual critics of poetry; I learned from a friend whom I believe to be reliable that one such fan announced that Cleanth Brooks is "definitely hip"—a term of warm approval.

The beboppers or hipsters are, however, a great deal more interesting than bebop itself. Yet they offer the most insistent testimonies to bebop's superiority to other kinds of music. " 'Do you dig Dizzy?' is fast becoming the musician's counterpart to 'Do you speak English?' " writes Mr. Mort Schillinger in *Downbeat,* in the characteristic razmataz style of the swing magazines. "Never before in the history of Jazz has so dynamic a

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person as Dizzy Gillespie gained the spotlight of acclaim and idolization . . . from the humblest of the unknown to the heights of huzza at which he stands today. With the waxing of Hawk's [Coleman Hawkins'] *Body and Soul* . . . Jazz reached a pinnacle of development. The human imagination has its limitations, just as the human arm or leg, and Jazz had reached the point where the musician's imagination could no longer function effectively without the added stimulus of new horizons for exploitation. There were two alternatives: either Jazz could remain stagnant and in time lose its identity as a highly creative art, or it could develop new facets for the imagination, new stimuli to artistic fabrication. Fortunately it followed the latter course—chose it and assigned the task to Dizzy Gillespie." Mr. Schillinger goes on to remark Gillespie's "genius for substituting and extending chords in unorthodox but singularly thrilling ways and places [and] Dizzy's entirely original articulation and phrasing which is hardly describable through the medium of the printed word without recourse to highly technical terminology. . . ."

Mr. Rudi Blesh, in a recent piece in the *Herald Tribune,* is more controlled. "Seeming non-sequiturs can be artfully combined to express an integrated idea, and this method, a psychological one, is common in modern music and literature. But the irrelevant parts of bebop are exactly what they seem; they add up to no such unity. . . . A capricious and neurotically rhapsodic sequence of effects for their own sake, [bebop] comes perilously close to complete nonsense as a musical expression. . . . Far from a culmination of jazz, bebop is not jazz at all but an ultimately degenerated form of swing, exploiting the most fantastic rhythms and unrelated harmonies that it would seem possible to conceive."

I have been listening to bebop on occasion for several years now, and lately, as I started work on this piece, listening with more strict attention; and I can only report, very possibly because of some deeply-buried strain of black reaction in me, that I have found this mu-

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sic uniformly thin, at once dilapidated and overblown, and exhibiting a poverty of thematic development and a richness of affectation not only, apparently, intentional, but enormously self-satisfied. Whole-tone progressions and triple-tongued runs are worked relentlessly, far beyond the saturation point. There has been nothing like this in the way of an overconsciousness of stylistic idiosyncrasy, I should say, since the Gothic Revival. Although bebop's defenders reserve as their trump card this music's "element of the unexpected," it is precisely bebop's undeviating pattern of incoherence and limitation that makes it predictable in the extreme, and ultimately as boring as the projects of Gutzon Borglum.

In Paris, where Erskine Caldwell, Steinbeck, Henry Miller, and Horace McCoy are best sellers and "nobody reads Proust any more," where the post-Picasso painters have sunk into torpor and repetition, and where intellectuals are more cynically Stalinized than in any other city in the world, bebop is vastly admired. Evidently Gresham's and Epstean's laws work with equal severity in other countries besides the United States, although a lot of people are taking Christ's own time finding it out.

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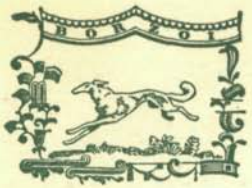

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